Happy Ending

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Happy Ending

by Robin_tCJ

Summary

Steve is a mobile massage therapist, and Tony is a stressed billionaire. What could go wrong?

Autumn

“Tony, you were supposed to be upstairs an hour ago.”

Tony rolls his eyes and rolls his stool back from the work bench. He turns to look at Pepper with what he hopes is a guileless, innocent grin. She's not fooled, of course, and simply glares at him, arms crossed delicately.

“I only need, like, 10 more minutes, Pep, seriously.”

“You are already 45 minutes late.”

“But this is so, so, so important.”

Pepper narrows her eyes and takes a step forward, and Tony realizes he's made a mistake. He tries to move his stool a little to the right, just enough to block the screen of his tablet, but she's already seen it.

“Are those the specs for the new version of the StarkPad?”

“They are specs for *a* version of the StarkPad,” he hedges, scratching at his neck. Stubbly – unacceptable, he needs to clean that up and get his beard in better shape.

“Tony,” she starts, her voice coming up an octave. “Tony, those look like *design* specs, Tony.”

He knows, after many years of working together, that he is three *Tony*s away from Pepper's angriest tone. He prays, and puts on his most hapless smile, already calculating how many pairs of shoes he's going to have to shell out for.

“Tony – you're supposed to be presenting a *prototype* today. Half an hour ago, Tony. This is not a prototype, this is... I don't even know what this is. What is this?”

“This is not my fault.”

Oh, shit. Wrong.

“I mean, it's not *not* my fault,” he backpedals, hands up either in placation or to ward off any coming blows. “Obviously. I just mean... it was fucked up, Pepper. The interface was fine, but the design – clunky. Unacceptable. I had to take it back.”

“To the literal drawing board?”

“Yes. Pepper. You know I can't abide a subpar product.” He tries on a disapproving look, but really, he can't match his PA's.

“Tony, Jesus. It's the board of directors.”

“Yes.”

“They wouldn't know a StarkPad from a DVR remote.”

“Rude.”

“And *true*, Tony. You could have shown them the prototype, then spent the next eight weeks fixing it before we took it to manufacturing.”

“But it would have –”

“It would have been *on time*.”

“But it would have been *shit*,” he says, willing her to understand. She pinches the bridge of her nose, and it takes all of his strength, all of his willpower, not to pump a fist into the air victoriously.

“Tony...”

“Pepper.”

She sighs, and meets his eye again. “You are insane.”

“Ruder.”

“I will go upstairs. I will explain to the board of directors that there is a delay, and they will snarl and growl like wolves, and we will reschedule this presentation.”

“That would be super.”

“And you will owe me. You will owe me so much.”

“Louboutins?”

“*So* many pairs.”

“I am prepared to live with that.”

Pepper sighs, and he can see the corners of her mouth twitching. He grins. Pepper can never stay mad at him for long.

“Will that be all, Mr. Stark?” she asks him, beginning to tap a few things out on her current StarkPad.

“That will be all, Ms. Potts,” he says, his grin turning into a soft smile. She turns to head for the elevator, and he has a thought as she's almost to the doors. “Oh, Pep?”

“Yes, Tony?” She doesn't turn. Barely slows down.

“Can you book me one of those mobile massage things? I've got an awful crick in my neck from poring over these design specs.” He can't quite keep the tremble of laughter out of his

voice.

“So, *so* many pairs,” she says as she steps onto the elevator. The doors close just before she starts to smile, and Tony just waves from his stool.

* * *

He spends another five hours in the workshop before Jarvis interrupts him.

“Excuse me, Sir. Ms. Potts has asked me to remind you that your massage appointment is in thirty minutes.”

Tony doesn't look up from his work – so many people can't help but look up at the ceiling when they're talking to Jarvis, but Tony, of course, knows the AI doesn't need the gesture. “My what, J?”

“Your massage therapy appointment. You requested an appointment with a mobile therapist from Ms. Potts.”

Tony blinks, looking away from his work. Right. He remembers now. “That was fast.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Do I need to... do anything?”

“Ms. Potts thought perhaps you might like to shower before the therapist arrives.”

Tony sniffs at his underarm, and can't help but recoil a little. Right. Hours of workshopping.

“Thanks, J. Save and shut everything down?”

“Of course, Sir.”

Tony absently gives DUM-E a little pat on the claw on his way by, stepping into the elevator. He doesn't have to tell Jarvis to take him to the penthouse, and takes another moment to appreciate the awesomeness of his AI coding.

He's tired. Now that he's not hunched over the workbench, fiddling with small parts and soldering tiny circuits, he realizes how tense he is. The muscles in his back are bunched into stiff knots, and he realizes he's looking forward to this appointment.

He steps under the hot spray of his shower, and lets the water sluice the first layer of dirt from his skin for a moment. He scrubs methodically, but quickly, and then steps out to trim out the shape of his goatee.

Tony doesn't worry about his hair, just leaves it damp and moves toward the kitchen in loose MIT sweat pants to raid the fridge for a snack. He munches on an apple while he checks his emails. He loses himself in the text, and is startled from his reading by Jarvis.

“Sir, your therapist is here.”

Tony hitches up his pants – faded and worn – and moves toward the elevator entrance.

When he opens the door to look up at the broad-shouldered, blue-eyed Adonis standing there, he nearly chokes on his bite of apple.

* * *

Steve is impressed. Sure, he's worked with the odd rich client before, but when he comes out of the subway station and makes his way to Stark Tower, he's almost giddy with anticipation. Tony Stark might be the most famous person he's ever massaged.

Truthfully, Steve doesn't have much use for modern technology. He's not a Luddite or anything – he has a smart phone. It's not a StarkPhone, of course, because really, that's a little out of his price range. He doesn't have extra funds to spare on things like that. But Stark Industries does more than phones and tablets – Steve reads enough of the news (yes, on paper, and no, that doesn't make him ninety – young people can read newspapers, too) to know Stark also puts a lot of money into medical equipment. Hell, Bucky's prosthetic arm is Stark Tech, and it's amazing. If he didn't know better himself, he might think it was flesh and blood. And Clint's hearing aids, too – best on the market. Other hearing aids, Clint said, just made sound loud enough to hear it happening, not enough to clean it up and make it legible. Like, you could talk behind him, but he wouldn't understand you if he couldn't read your lips. But Stark aids, he told them, meant he could actually make out what people were saying even when he wasn't looking at them.

So Steve might be having a bit of a moment as he checks in at the desk, and the security guard gestures him toward a smaller elevator, away from the main elevator bank where a steady stream of people are going in and out.

It's the end of the business day, he knows, but that doesn't seem to be stopping employees from entering the building. Stark must be a bit of a ballbuster. Steve can't say he's surprised – you probably don't get to be the world's biggest tech mogul by running banker's hours.

He steps into the elevator and moves to press the button, when he realizes this elevator doesn't *have* buttons. The doors close before he can step out to ask the guard.

“Welcome to the private elevator of Tony Stark. Is Mr. Stark expecting you?” The British voice, slightly tinny, comes out of a speaker somewhere in the elevator. Steve looks around for a moment, then settles for looking up at the ceiling.

“I... we have an appointment? I'm the – I'm a massage therapist?”

“Yes, of course, Sir. I will inform Mr. Stark that you have arrived.”

The elevator starts to move up.

“Uh... thank you?”

“You're quite welcome.”

Steve can't help but wonder at the technology here. He'd more or less thought Bucky's arm was the pinnacle of modern science, and he knows that a talking elevator shouldn't dwarf that particular achievement, but there had been something in the elevator's voice that just – seemed intelligent. Bucky's arm is made of sensors and wires, but it can't think for itself.

The elevator doesn't make a sound when it finally stops at what Steve assumes is Stark's penthouse. The doors open with a whoosh, and there in front of him is Tony Stark.

In particular, Tony Stark wearing a pair of faded, old sweat pants, and no shirt.

Stark lets out a little cough, the hand holding a half-eaten apple moving up toward his face. He swallows, blinks, and then grins.

“Well, hi there.”

Steve blinks, and drags his eyes away from Stark's low waistband and looks up into his eyes, trying to will the flush away from his cheeks.

“Mr. Stark. Where do you want me?” He feels his ears go red and curses himself silently. “I mean, where do you want me to set up?” He gestures at the portable massage table he has slung over his shoulder, and Stark's smile widens, his eyes dancing.

“Living room's good. This way.”

“All right.” Steve follows him through the suite, and can't help but look around. The floor-to-ceiling windows give a perfect view of the glittering lights of the city below. Stark Tower isn't the tallest building in New York, but it's no slouch. The view from here is perfect – he thinks he can almost see the Statue of Liberty from here.

“Your elevator is amazing,” Steve says. He inwardly rolls his eyes at himself.

“The elevator? Really?”

“Well, the talking part of it.”

“Oh, Jarvis? Actually, he runs the tower.”

“The... whole thing?”

“And then some. He has some remote capabilities as well.”

“Wow. Where do you get artificial intelligence like that?” Steve asks, impressed.

Stark looks at him sideways for a moment. “I build it.”

Steve feels like an idiot. Of course Stark would have built the AI himself. He's Tony Stark.

“Nice place you've got here,” he says, stupidly, changing the subject. He feels the back of his neck heat up again and wills himself to be more suave. It doesn't work, of course.

“Thanks,” Stark says, without a hint of sarcasm. “You got a name?”

“Sorry?”

“What can I call you?”

Steve shakes his head a little. He needs to stop with the idiot act. He's a professional. And Stark might be gorgeous in person, but he's massaged attractive people before. Rich people, too. He's here to do a job, and he needs to stop acting like a teenager and get it done.

“Steve Rogers,” he finally says, feeling awkward and too big for his bones. He takes the shoulder strap from his table up over his head and starts unzipping it, unfolding it and standing it up. He pulls a set of soft, white sheets from his duffel bag and quickly spreads it over the padded leather, followed by a soft, woven blanket. He finally turns to face his client.

“Is there anything particular you were hoping we could work on?” he asks as he turns.

Stark's eyes snap up to his, and he watches the older man swallow. “I – uh, yeah, I've got some tension. In my back. And my neck. And – well, everywhere, really.”

Steve smiles warmly. *Professionally*. “Of course. Why don't I leave the room – you can undress to whatever feels comfortable, and then get under the sheet, on your front to start. I'll be back in a moment.”

Steve collects his duffel bag, and heads out of the room into the kitchen, where they'd just come from. After a moment, he hears rustling in the living room and pulls out his oil belt and puts it on. He unscrews the cap on a bottle of massage oil, scented a little with lemongrass, and puts in the pump top before slipping it into the proper compartment of his belt. He takes a small hand towel and folds it over the strap on the other side, and then runs a hand through his hair.

He clears his throat and leans back toward the doorway. “Are you ready, Mr. Stark?”

“Uh, yeah. Come on in.”

Steve enters the room, and sees Stark's sweats draped across a chair. He's got the sheet pulled up over his waist, and Steve takes a moment to admire the smooth planes of his back, the muscles in his shoulders, along his spine, toward the top of the sheet. The gentle swell of what is clearly a well-shaped back end. Steve swallows and takes a deep breath.

When he speaks, he's lowered his voice a little. Down just a register, to promote relaxation. “Are you comfortable?”

“Sure,” Stark says, as Steve takes a pillow and places it under his feet. He gently drags the sheet up, baring one of Stark's legs. The calf muscle is defined, the skin peppered with dark hair. Steve pumps some oil into his hand and rubs his palms together, and then lays his hands on the skin in front of him.

This is his job.

* * *

The thing Tony really notices is that Steve's hands are warm. He'd sort of expected the touch to be cool, but it's actually warmer than his own flesh. And strong. Steve's fingers are really strong. He's barely even started, and his thumbs are digging deliciously into the muscle on the back of his thigh, targeting knots Tony hadn't even been aware of.

He lets out a breath, and tries to ignore the fact that it may have hitched a little bit into a moan. He stares at the floor through the hole in the table, and can't stop his hands from gripping the cushion a little tighter over his head as Steve slides over another knot, working his way down Tony's leg.

“Is that all right?” Steve asks him.

“Wha?” At the question, Tony is pulled out of a haze of pleasure-pain as Steve works at the arch of his foot.

“The pressure. Is that good? Or too much?”

“No, that's – shit, no, it's good.”

Steve's low chuckle goes straight to his cock. Shit.

Tony huffs out a breath as Steve's thumbs dig into the flesh between the bones at the top of his foot. “How long have you been doing this?”

“A little over a year,” Steve tells him, moving the sheet to cover the leg he's just finished, and moving to the other side, and the other leg.

“You – oh, Jesus – you like it?”

Tony is rewarded with another quiet chuckle, and Steve uses the heel of his hand to press at a stubborn muscle in his calf.

“Sure,” Steve responds, but Tony can hear a note of hesitation. He doesn't press, though – this is small talk. He doesn't really know this guy.

Steve finishes the second leg, and covers Tony's lower body with the sheet again. He moves up the table and slides the sheet down off Tony's back, folding it down and tucking it into the waistband of his boxer briefs with his thumbs. Then Steve moves to the front of the table, and pumps the oil bottle a couple of times before placing his hands on Tony's shoulders and then gliding them down his spine, leaning over Tony's body until his fingertips brush the top of the sheet, then bringing those huge, strong hands back up to the top of his spine along the outside of his ribs. Steve does it again, and again, and all Tony can do is look at Steve's crotch, which is basically right in front of his face. He tries not to look, he really does, but it's right there.

He feels himself harden, and finally wills his eyes closed, trying to will his burgeoning erection away as well.

He doesn't say anything for a few minutes, until he feels Steve move to the side and start working on his back in earnest.

This time, Tony can't hold back a moan. It's not a sexual moan, not really, but the feel of Steve's strong fingers glancing over the series of knots down his back is too intense, and he can't keep the sound in.

It's not so loud that he can't hear Steve's hitch of breath.

“Are you okay?” Steve asks him after a moment.

“Sure. Sure. Just – tenser than I thought.”

“I can ease up on the pressure if you need.”

“No. No, it's good. It feels... good,” he finishes lamely.

“Okay. Take deep breaths, it'll help.”

Tony tries to do as he's instructed, letting Steve work in silence for a while, broken only by Tony's intermittent sighs.

He's almost asleep when he feels Steve's touch lighten, fingers ghosting over his neck.

He brings the sheet up and places a warm, solid palm against the small of Tony's back, the other palm pushing the sheet up along his spine to the back of his neck.

“Would you like to turn over now, Mr. Stark?”

Tony blinks himself back to reality, and shifts experimentally. He does not appear to have an erection, and he thanks God for small favours. Steve lifts the sheet from the side farthest from himself, giving Tony some privacy to turn over onto his front, then drapes the sheet back down.

Steve moves down the table and frees one of Tony's legs again, and starts working at the foot, and up his shin, and when his hands move up to Tony's thigh, he realizes he's made a terrible mistake.

Tony clenches his jaw and does some calculations in his head. Thinks of baseball. Thinks of baseball statistics calculations.

Oh, God, how much longer?

* * *

Steve knows he's pushing the envelope. He can't help it, though. He glances up at Stark's face, and sees his eyes screwed closed, and his jaw muscles trembling. He knows he's not helping Stark relax right now, but technically his hands aren't going anywhere inappropriate. He wouldn't do that. But he can't help but take pleasure in the fact that he knows his touch is... distracting. He flushes with pleasure when he sees Stark's hands clench into the padding on either side of the table.

Steve glances at the clock and realizes they're going to run out of time if he doesn't move on. He feels a moment of regret, even though this is his last appointment of the day, and he can go home after this. He moves to the other side, and tries not to rush his way through the lower leg to get to Stark's other thigh. He can see Stark's abdominals clenching with effort, and see his chest rising and falling shallowly.

“Breathe,” he reminds his client, trying to keep the smile out of his voice. Reluctantly, he covers Stark's legs and moves up the table a little, and takes Stark's hand in his. Stark jolts a little, and then Steve starts working the ropey muscles of his hand, up his wrist, into his forearm.

“Jesus,” Stark breathes, almost shuddering in pleasure.

“You work with your hands a lot?” Steve asks softly, trying not to speak intrusively as his thumbs bump over knots and tension.

Stark lets out a breathy chuckle, and Steve's throat goes dry. That sound is – he suddenly feels a little bad for teasing Stark with the thigh-massage.

“Yeah. All the time.”

Steve works up the arm a little, into the bicep, and then the shoulder. “You should take breaks. To stretch some of this out.”

Stark barks out a laugh.

“Was that funny?” Steve asks.

“Are you in league with my PA? Did Pepper put you up to this?”

“I don't understand.”

“When she called to make the appointment, did she tell you to say that?”

Steve moves to the other arm. “I work for an agency – I don't really take the calls.”

“Right. Heh. Sorry. It's just – Pepper, my PA, would agree with you. About breaks.”

Steve works at Stark's shoulders, his neck, working at the muscles surrounding Stark's clavicles, working the top of his pecs, trying not to pay too much attention to dusky, brown nipples. Trying not to think about what they would feel like rolling between his fingers. Between his teeth.

“You... aren't you the boss, though?”

“Sorry?” Steve feels bad – Stark was relaxing again, and he'd interrupted that.

“You're the boss. So shouldn't you be, you know, not working that hard?”

One corner of Stark's mouth lifts in a smirk. “I'm pretty hands-on.”

The mental image, while not unwelcome, is not timely. Steve tries to push it out of his mind so he can concentrate on his work.

* * *

Tony nearly falls asleep again as Steve's fingers gently trace over his jaw, his earlobes, then his temples. He's proud of himself for managing not to get an embarrassing hard-on while he's been on his back, and all the tension has been worked out of his body. Steve places warm, steady hands on Tony's shoulders, resting them there for a grounding moment.

“Okay, Mr. Stark. We're done here. I'll wait in the next room. Take your time getting up.”

Tony lets out a sigh, and slowly sits up, blinking owlishly. He glances around, and is surprised at how dark it is. Jarvis must have lowered the lights while Steve was working.

Tony wipes oil from his hands on the sheets, and slips his sweat pants on and pads out to the kitchen, where Steve is waiting.

“How do you feel?” Steve asks him.

“You are the best masseuse ever,” Tony tells him, grinning. “I haven't felt this relaxed in – I don't know, months, probably.”

“Therapist.”

Tony blinks at him. “What?”

“Massage therapist. Not masseuse.”

“Okay. Whatever, your hands are fucking magic.”

“I took classes,” Steve says, zipping up his duffel bag and moving back toward the living room to start packing up his table.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“You called me a masseuse. I'm a registered massage therapist. I went to school and everything.”

“Okay,” Tony says, not really sure where he went wrong here.

“And besides, I'm a guy.”

“I... can see that?”

“So you should have said masseur. I still prefer 'massage therapist', but you'd have been slightly less wrong.”

Tony grins suddenly. He likes this guy.

Most people, when faced with Tony Stark, are best described as... weaselly. It's not their fault – he understands that people expect him to be an asshole, and therefore not want to treat him like a normal person. The only people in his life who are happy to argue with him, or correct him, are Pepper and Rhodey.

So Steve's insistence is not only amusing, it's endearing. Tony grins at him, letting the warmth reach his eyes.

“Sorry, Steve. My mistake.”

“Not a problem.”

Steve has his supplies packed up by now, and hitches the table up on his shoulder.

“So. Your card is on file with the office, so payment is taken care of. Drink plenty of water, and get some rest.” Steve is heading for the elevator, and suddenly Tony doesn't want him to go.

“You – uh, what's your schedule like?”

“Excuse me?”

“Your schedule. This – uh, next week. This was... good. And I should do this... more. Massages, I mean.”

Steve catches his bottom lip between his teeth, and Tony is left with the sudden urge to run his tongue along it.

“I think it's pretty normal. You'd have to call the agency, but I do have some appointments available.”

“Great. I'll call you. Or, I guess, them. Well, I'll get Pepper to call them, but yeah.”

“Okay,” Steve says as he steps into the open elevator. “It was nice to meet you, Mr. Stark.”

“Call me Tony,” he says, glancing down at the floor, then back up to Steve's clear blue eyes. “You can call me Tony.”

Steve flushes again, and Tony feels a slight thrill at it. “Okay, then,” he says, smiling as the elevator doors close. “Nice to meet you, Tony.”

The doors close, and Tony slumps against them, letting his forehead rest against the stainless steel.

“Jesus,” he mutters to himself, taking a deep breath.

* * *

Steve glances down at his phone. He leans back against the seat and lets his massage table rest on the floor of the subway car.

Have you sent my tuition cheque yet? The text from his sister, Nat, glares back at him.

He hasn't sent it. He knows it's due right away, and of all the places that aren't going to let people study on credit, Yale is near the top of the list. But he's running short this month – he'd been down with the flu a couple weeks ago, and had to give up a week's worth of appointments. It's the whole reason he's even on this train – he'd told Bucky and Clint he'd go to the Rangers game with them, but when the agency had called and said he'd been specifically requested for an appointment, he'd had to agree.

He needs the money. It definitely doesn't have anything to do with the fact that the client in question is Tony Stark.

Not that he particularly minds missing the Rangers game. They've been playing like shit. But Bucky had given him that disappointed look, and Steve does feel guilty for changing his plans.

However, he tells himself, you have to do what you have to do.

Have you sent my tuition cheque yet? The text is still there, mocking him. He lets out a breath and quickly taps out a reply.

I popped it in the mail yesterday. Stop worrying.

He'll put it in the mail tomorrow morning. By the time it actually gets to New Haven, he'll have the money in his account to keep the cheque from bouncing. Nat won't know the difference.

K. Love you bro.

Love you, too, he types back before slipping his phone back into his pocket. The train is almost at his stop.

He stands to allow a young woman and her daughter to take his seat, ducking his head in acknowledgment when she thanks him, and moves near the doors. He hitches the strap of his table up on his shoulder and waits for them to open. The table's heavy, but he's used to it by now.

Maybe a normal spa, or a hotel or something, would be an easier job. He knows he'd have a set schedule, and he wouldn't have to lug his table around the city. He'd also get paid a lot less. Nat's got another year of law school after this, and while the school has allowed him to pay on a quarterly basis, the tuition is still $80,000 a year. Yes, Nat's got a couple of scholarships, and some loans, but it doesn't amount to much. At least, not enough to ease the burden.

He carries his table off the train and heads for the exits, on his way to Stark Tower. He had decided a long time ago that his baby sister would always be able to depend on him. When their parents had died, he'd promised himself she would never want for anything. Of course, that was before he found out about the financial situation.

He's dragged out of his thoughts when he reaches the front entrance to Stark Tower. It's just as busy as it had been the previous week, and the security guard waves him in the direction of the personal elevator.

“Good evening, Mr. Rogers,” the elevator – Jarvis – greets him when he enters. “Welcome back.”

“Thanks, Jarvis,” Steve says, feeling silly, but almost giddy at the same time.

“Mr. Stark has asked that I let you into the penthouse suite to begin setting up. He is, regretfully, running late.”

“Not a problem, thank you,” Steve says, looking up at the ceiling.

The doors slide open and he walks through the apartment to the living room. He feels weird being in Stark's place without him, but he supposes if he were unwelcome, Jarvis wouldn't have let him in.

He unfolds his table and dresses it with clean sheets. Takes his phone out of his pocket to turn the ringer off, and glances at the clock. Stark is only a couple of minutes late, and while ordinarily Steve is a bit of a stickler for punctuality, he finds he doesn't mind so much. He looks around the room, noting the understated but obviously expensive furnishings. Everything in the room is modern-looking, except for the sofa – a big, grey monstrosity that

looks to Steve like it might be the most comfortable thing ever. He almost steps forward to try it out when the door behind him opens, and he whirls on his heel

* * *

Tony comes out of his bedroom still damp from his shower, hair dripping, and grins at Steve in his living room.

“Sorry, I've been going all day, and I thought maybe you didn't want to know what three days of engine grease and welding rods smells like,” Tony says, unable to keep himself from looking Steve up and down. He certainly hadn't *forgotten* how attractive the massage therapist is, but the reminder in person serves as a nice bit of evidence that he hadn't been exaggerating it in his mind. He hitches his thumbs into the waistband of his sweats and waggles his eyebrows. “We about ready to get started?”

“Of course, Mr. Stark. You go ahead and get comfortable, and I'll be back in just a moment.”

Steve heads into the kitchen with his duffel bag, and Tony slips his pants off and lays on the table, naked as a jaybird.

He's not trying to tempt Steve. Not really. Well, maybe a little. He realizes he could be wearing his underwear right now. But it's his home, and he really *does* have some tension in his glutes.

And, okay, maybe he has a bit of a fantasy about Steve's hands on his ass. But that's neither here nor there.

He shifts on the table as Steve re-enters the room, adjusting the sheet so it covers Tony up to his shoulders.

“Anything in particular you'd like me to work on tonight?”

“Uh – back's tense again. I've got deadlines, or something. And my ass.”

“Excuse me?”

Tony tries not to smirk at the little bit of strain in Steve's voice. “My glutes? I've got some tension there. Is that weird?”

“Not at all. You'd be surprised how many people carry their stress there.”

“Well, I've got enough stress for three or four people, so you've got your work cut out for you.”

“I'm not worried,” Steve answers. He gets to work, and Tony doesn't say anything for a while, just enjoying the feel of Steve's soft, warm hands pushing and pulling at his flesh.

About an hour in, he realizes his mistake. Well, several mistakes, really.

Steve has worked his legs, and his back, and has moved to stand at Tony's hip. He leaves the sheet where it is, covering his butt, and starts working over it, pushing the heel of his hand experimentally into different parts of the muscle.

So on the one hand, Tony realizes he really could have been wearing his briefs for this. Clearly Steve's going to stay over the sheet.

On the other hand, even without the oily slide of those strong hands on the flesh of his buttocks, he's enjoying Steve's hands enough that his cock has started to harden.

He lets out a groan of pleasure as Steve pushes against a somewhat painful knot, and hears Steve let out a shaky breath above him. He swallows, the sound clicking in a dry throat, and tries to will his erection away. But Steve's hands on him, the slight shift in the tempo of his breathing, is making it impossible. Steve's thumb skips over the curve of his ass, almost teasing at the juncture of his thigh, and he lets out a moan that even he can't pass off as being a reaction to a newly located knot.

* * *

“All right, Mr. Stark, you can turn over now,” Steve says, trying to keep his voice level, lifting the sheet away from him.

Nothing happens.

“Mr. Stark?” he tries again. Maybe he's fallen asleep? “Would you like to turn over?”

“Wow, this is embarrassing,” Stark finally says, his voice a little hoarse.

“Are you okay?”

“I – yes, I am fine. However, I think we'll stick with just my back today.”

“Are you sure? We still have another twenty minutes left.”

“Oh, I'm *unquestionably* sure that I don't want to roll over onto my back.”

“What?” And then Steve realizes, and feels his cheeks heat almost instantly. “Oh. *Oh.*”

“Oh, God,” Stark groans, and he sounds mortified.

Steve ignores the little rush of pleasure low in his belly. “It's fine, Mr. Stark. Really. It's a – a natural response,” he says.

“Well, sure, but that doesn't make it *less* embarrassing,” Stark points out.

“It's really fine. I don't – I don't mind,” Steve says. He takes a deep breath and tries to stop stumbling over his words. “I can – I have more blankets. I can put them over – you know.”

Steve wonders how red his face is right now.

Stark chuckles tightly, and Steve can see that the back of his neck is red, too. It makes him feel a little better.

“If it's all the same to you,” Stark says, “I think I'm just going to not turn over.”

“Of course. That's fine. Whatever you're comfortable with.”

Stark chuckles again. “You are seriously making me sound like a prude right now.”

“Well, I mean...” Steve starts.

“I am *not* a prude,” Stark says, not quite managing to sound offended. “I have a well-deserved reputation for being a playboy.”

“I had heard that.”

“So if I want to keep my body's *natural response* to myself, that's my business.”

Steve's trying not to laugh at Stark's affronted tone.

“And I'll thank you to remember,” Stark continues – and Steve can hear the barely concealed laughter in his voice – “that I tip well, and it would be smart of you to forget this conversation ever happened, and get back to work.”

“What conversation?” Steve asks innocently.

“Atta boy,” Stark says, looking up from the table with a grin.

Steve lays the sheet back down over Stark's body and folds it back down at his waist, moving to the head of the table and starting to work on Stark's arms and shoulders from there.

It's not the first time he's had a male client get an erection. He hadn't been lying about it being a natural response – people have all kinds of different erogenous zones, and while the massage itself isn't meant to be titillating, he knows people can't always control their reactions. So it's not the first time this has happened to him. It is, however, the first time his mouth has watered at the idea of it. The first time it's been a client he *wanted*. The first time he'd thought of pulling that sheet down and spreading those perfect, firm cheeks and slipping his tongue down – *Jesus*. He really needs to stop this train of thought.

Tony is his client, and Steve is, despite all evidence to the contrary, capable of maintaining professionalism.

“You can call me Tony,” Stark says from the table, and Steve starts a little. “I mentioned that, didn't I?

“If you like.”

“I do.”

Steve finishes the rest of the massage in silence, and then leaves Stark – Tony – in the living room to get dressed. He washes his hands in the kitchen sink and starts packing his oil and other supplies into his duffel.

Tony joins him in the kitchen a moment later, smirking.

“How do you feel?” Steve asks him.

“Good. Thanks. So listen, I was going to ask you, how do you feel about a regular appointment schedule?”

Steve moves back into the living room to start packing up his table, and Tony follows him.

“That can be arranged with the office,” he explains, trying to control the pounding of his heart.

“I want to know how you feel about it, first.”

Steve stops what he's doing and meets Tony's eye. He knows this is a bad idea. He knows it, deep in his gut, that his attraction to Tony – to his *client* – is inappropriate. That he should tell Tony no, and tell Sharon in the office that he'd prefer not to take appointments with Mr. Stark.

He *knows* this.

“That would be fine.”

God, he's stupid.

“Great,” Tony says, clapping his hands together. “I'll set it up. Well, Pepper will set it up.”

“I look forward to it,” Steve says. He finishes folding up the table, and he reaches for the hand towel draped across the arm of a chair at the same time Tony reaches to hand it to him, and for just a second, their fingers brush together.

Intellectually, Steve knows there isn't a shock of electricity there. He has touched Tony's hands before – he's massaged them, even. Hell, not that long ago he'd had a handful of Tony's ass (*and, oh, what a handful*). So this gentle touch? This accidental brush of fingers? Definitely shouldn't go straight to his gut, to his dick, shouldn't make his throat dry and his cheeks red.

But it does.

He snatches his hand back, running it through his hair, before putting the towel away in his bag and finishing packing up.

“So. See you soon,” Steve says, trying to sound professional instead of breathless with lust.

Tony's got a small smile on his face, as he sees Steve to the door. “See you, Steve.”

The elevator doors close behind him, and Steve slumps against the wall.

God, he's *so* screwed.

* * *

“No, really, it was totally impressive,” Steve says, and Tony can hear the grin in his voice even as he pushes against a mean knot alongside his spine.

“You said he was playing the Itsy Bitsy Spider,” Tony chuckles, lifting his head a little from the table to look at Steve's face out of the corner of his eye. He's rewarded with a hard palm sliding across his lower back, pushing deep.

“But in a *complex* way. Like, it sounded like a whole symphony, the way he was playing it.”

Tony bites his lip, throwing a teasing grin over his shoulder. “I feel like you might be attributing a little more talent to random subway violinists than is strictly necessary."

Steve's laugh is warm and rich, and it sends a shiver down Tony's body all the way to his toes.

“I swear, it was magical. I started to think I was on one of those hidden camera shows, because no one else was noticing this intense music.”

“Maybe he wasn't that *good*,” Tony snickers.

“Oh my God, Tony, I'm serious. It was really, really impressive. One of those true story type of things that end up becoming Oscar-winning movies. Like, the middle-aged guy with a beard to his belly button playing the violin like a savant on the subway.”

“Remind me to copyright that,” Tony laughs, breath hitching when Steve hits a knot under his shoulder blade.

“Did you do *any* of the stretches I gave you last time?” Steve asks, voice showing just a hint of aggravation.

“I get on a roll, I don't have time to stop and do yoga,” Tony says, rolling his eyes.

Steve sighs. “At least do a couple of shoulder rolls or something once in a while? Please?”

Tony tries hard not to think about other scenarios in which Steve could say 'please'.

* * *

“I'm surrounded by morons, you have no idea,” Tony huffs, shifting on the table. Steve digs his thumb into the bottom of Tony's heel, relishing the tiny little whimper it elicits.

“Do you ever take vacation? You seem to be under a lot of stress lately,” Steve says, trying not to think about Tony spread out on a beach somewhere, golden skin glinting in the sun.

“Pepper would suggest that I vacation daily, when I skip all the boring meeting parts and stay down in the workshop building tech and knots for you to have something to do.”

“All these knots would argue the point with her,” Steve mutters, instantly regretting the words. He's supposed to be a professional, not disparage Tony's personal assistant.

But Tony lets out a bark of laughter, shoulders shaking with mirth. “If you had ever really met Pepper, you would be curling up in a corner in the fetal position under the assumption that it was possible she'd just heard you.”

“She can't be that bad.”

“The woman is terrifying.”

“But *she* works for *you*,” Steve says, confused. “Don't you just tell her what to do?”

“Oh, *God* no,” Tony says, letting out a sigh as Steve finds a knot in his ankle. “No, no, no. I *ask*, very politely, if Pepper will deign to do something well beneath her skill set, and hope that she does it without plotting some sort of terrible revenge.”

“Couldn't you just fire her?”

“Wouldn't dream of it,” Tony says, his voice pitching in a way that makes Steve think the meaning behind the words is '*are you insane?*'

“But if you can't tell her what to do –”

Tony chuckles lightly. “Pepper is the best thing that's ever happened to me,” he says after a moment. “She's smart, and tough, and terrifying, and way, way too good to be my assistant. She runs my life, she runs my house, she runs my company. She keeps me on task when I just want to be down in the workshop, and makes sure I get where I need to be when I'm supposed to be there. Mostly.”

“Oh,” Steve says, swallowing down a feeling he can't name at the low, serious tone of Tony's voice.

“She puts up with my shit, and I make it nearly impossible to put up with my shit. I am completely *full* of shit. But Pepper takes it and deals with it and makes me better.”

“That sounds nice,” Steve says.

“I honestly don't know where I'd be without Pepper. I don't – I don't have a lot of friends.” Tony's voice lowers in register, but picks up in speed. “I don't – that sounds weird, but I don't. Mostly it's people who want something from me, or want what I can do for them, or – you know, not real friends. Not people I trust, not people who actually *care* about me. Tony, not Stark Industries, I mean.”

Steve doesn't say anything, but finds his hands clenching on Tony's ankle. He feels sad, suddenly, wanting to pull Tony up off the table and wrap him up in a tight hug, keep him warm and safe and loved.

Well, not *loved*, of course, but – but cared for. Certainly not loved, that would be ridiculous.

“Pepper's one of those people. She puts up with my shit, and not for a pay check. She puts up with my shit because she genuinely likes me. And I genuinely like her.”

“That sounds really nice,” Steve says, aware that he's repeating himself. Aware that the lump in his throat is tightening his voice.

“I'm sorry. I made it weird,” Tony says sighing.

Steve's hands move up to Tony's back, pressing against the muscle there. He doesn't say anything for a moment.

“I'm glad you have her. That's good. A lot of people aren't – we don't think about how much our friends mean to us, most of the time. How important they are to us. It's good that you recognize it in her.”

Tony doesn't respond.

“Did you and she ever – you know?” He knows he's crossing a line. He knows that, of course he does, but he asks anyway.

Tony snorts a laugh. “Oh, *fuck*, no. I like my balls right where they are, thank you.”

Steve can't help but laugh with him.

Winter

“So when am I going to meet this guy?”

“What?” Tony blinks up from his coffee, meeting Rhodey's eye. What were they talking about?

“This guy you keep talking about. Steve. When am I going to meet him?”

“Why would you meet him?”

Rhodey dips his chin down and looks at Tony sideways. “Since when don't you introduce me to your boyfriends?”

Tony blinks rapidly, his brain catching up with the conversation. “Boyfriend? Wait, no, Rhodey –”

“I mean, I know I don't always approve, but if you'd stop dating losers –”

“Rhodey, he's not my *boyfriend.*” Oh, God.

Rhodey furrows his brow. “So, what, you're just screwing?”

Tony lets his forehead fall to the table.

“You know, Rhodey, I always love when you come to visit me. It's pure joy.”

“Tony, what the hell are you talking about?”

“Okay, I may have – I may have forgotten to mention that Steve is my massage therapist.” Tony's voice is muffled against the table, as he has chosen not to lift his head back up, yet, at this moment.

He hears Rhodey's sigh.

“Tony, are you hitting on staff again?”

“No. *No*. I just spend a lot of time with him. A couple hours a week. So we talk sometimes.”

“You're not dating, Tony. He's providing you a service.”

“Yeah, but he keeps coming back. I think he likes me.”

“You're paying him, Tony.”

“Yeah, but we *talk*.”

“Still not dating, Tony.”

Tony rolls his forehead against the cool marble of the table. “So, should I ask him?”

“What?”

“On a date. Should I ask him out?”

“Is he allowed to say yes? Do you even know if he's gay?”

“Well, I won't know until I ask,” Tony says, raising his head from the table so he can take another gulp of coffee.

“Didn't you tell me two days ago you had the best massage therapist in the world?”

“Well, yeah. His hands are fucking *magic*.”

Rhodey crosses his arms and leans back in his chair. “You realize if you ask him, and he says no, you can't have massages anymore, right?”

No. No, he obviously did *not* realize that.

“Well, fuck.”

* * *

“What's with the mope?” Buck asks him, sliding a cup of coffee in front of him on the table where he's resting his head on his arms.

“I'm not moping,” Steve says, glaring up at his friend without lifting his head.

“Sulking?”

“Shut up.”

“Seriously, Steve. What's going on?”

Steve sighs. “I might have to quit my job.”

Bucky sits down, leaning his elbows on the table. Ready to listen.

Steve sits up and wraps his hands around his mug, threading his fingers together. Hesitates.

“Come on, Stevie. What's going on?”

Steve sighs. “Okay, so I have this client.”

Bucky waits expectantly.

“Right. So, I have this client.” Steve swallows. “His name's Tony. And he's gorgeous. Like, unfairly, unreasonably gorgeous.” He hears Clint snicker from the other room, and suddenly feels the urge to curse the Stark Tech hearing aids.

“Okay,” Bucky says, waving a hand in encouragement.

“And I kind of – I think it's starting to get inappropriate.”

Bucky's eyes darken with anger. “Is he harassing you?”

Steve wants to die a little. “No, Buck. On *my* end. Like, I'm massaging him – touching him, and I want to *touch* him.”

Bucky looks unconvinced.

“Touch him in inappropriate ways.”

Bucky snorts.

“I can't keep – we have a twice-weekly appointment, Buck. I'm dying. I feel like I'm completely out of control. Every time, I think it's going to be the time I break and just grab him and – I'll get fired. Worse, I could lose my license, I could even go to *jail*.”

“Can you fuck him if he's *not* a client?” Clint asks from the living room.

“That's not the point,” Steve says, loudly.

“So quit,” Bucky tells him.

Steve sighs. “I can't do that.”

Bucky glares. “Well, why the fuck not?”

“You know why. You know I need the money.”

“No, what you *need* is to tell her the truth.”

“How the hell am I supposed to do that? 'Oh, by the way, Nat, you're going to have to quit law school because Dad didn't tell Mom he lost his job and went through all their savings, and your college fund, and triple mortgaged the house, and defaulted on the life insurance payments, and then they died, and left us with nothing, so I quit art so you could keep going to school, but it's fine, I'm sure you won't mind tending bar the rest of your life.' Yeah, that's going to go over great.”

“Hey, I *like* tending bar,” Clint grumbles from the couch.

“But Nat wants to be a lawyer. She *deserves* to be a lawyer. She's going to be so good at it.”

“And it'll happen, Stevie. It will. But you can't keep doing this to yourself – it's not helping her.”

Steve sets his jaw stubbornly. “It is helping her. I can manage – the important thing is that Nat gets through school. That's what Mom and Dad would have wanted, and it's what I want for her. I promised.”

Bucky signs, staring into his eyes.

“She'd understand,” he says quietly. “You know she would.”

“I don't want her to have to worry about this stuff.”

“So you'll do all the worrying for her.”

Steve twitches one corner of his mouth up in a wry smile. “As long as she's happy, that's all that matters.”

“Just – be careful. Don't get hurt here.”

“Nothing to get hurt over. It's just a stupid crush. I'll get over it, and I'll do my job. I can do that much.”

Bucky looks at him like he's not sure he believes the words. Steve wonders, a little, if it's really Bucky he's trying to convince.

* * *

“You know you're terminally punctual? You've come through that elevator three minutes before our appointment each time you've been up here,” Tony says languidly from the table, apropos of nothing.

“My roommate tells me the same thing,” Steve says, working on a stubborn muscle under his shoulder blade.

“You've got a roommate?”

“Two, actually.”

“Sounds crowded,” Tony murmurs, his voice rasping a little as Steve hits a knot just right.

“Sorry. Am I talking too much?” Steve asks, cheeks flushing.

“I don't mind. I like talking to you.”

Steve feels a frisson of pleasure down his spine. “So, yeah. I'm staying with my friend Bucky and his boyfriend.”

“Still sounds crowded,” Tony says, and Steve can hear the grin in his voice.

“It's not bad. I work a lot, and they're both out a lot. Wouldn't matter anyway – Buck and I have been close since we were in diapers. He grew up in the house beside us. We used to torture my little sister, Nat.”

Tony chuckles, letting it peter out into a sigh when Steve runs the pads of his fingers down his spine.

“But it's not just you and Bucky, his boyfriend lives there, too?”

“Yeah, but it's good. We get along.” After a moment, Steve snorts out an amused sound.

“What?”

“Well, actually, Clint and I dated first.”

“Sounds awkward *and* crowded,” Tony amends with a low chuckle.

“Nah. Nat set us up – she and Clint are friends. She thought Clint and I would get along, so she introduced us.We had one long, awkward date, and when Clint dropped me off at home, he met Bucky.”

“Ooh. Intrigue,” Tony says, popping his head up from the table to give Steve a grin.

“Bucky harassed me for *weeks*, trying to get Clint's number. I finally gave in, and when Bucky picked up the phone to call, the phone rang in his hand – Clint had finally wheedled Bucky's number out of Nat.”

Tony chuckled. “So love at first sight?”

“Something like that. Actually, I'm still convinced Clint got Bucky's number by stealing Nat's phone while she was in the shower or something.”

“That's nice, though. Have they been together long?”

“Couple of years, now.”

“And it's not weird?”

“What, because of me and Clint? God, no. There was never any chemistry there. We're friends, though, so it's good. Nat was right about that – we definitely get along.”

“That's good,” Tony says.

Steve keeps working, wondering why he's told Tony this story. They talk a lot during appointments, true, but usually it's small talk. He hasn't very often talked about his personal life. He knows better.

But Tony seems interested. And it's been so long since someone was really interested in what Steve had to say.

Steve lifts the sheet, and Tony rolls onto his back, and Steve starts to work on his hands and arms.

Tony's eyes are closed in pleasure, but Steve knows that the initial... *natural response* to the contact of the massage has passed. Tony hasn't had an erection problem since that second appointment. Part of him misses it – he knows it's dumb. He knows that. It's better this way, because it's less distracting and Steve can just do his job. But that stupid part of him really enjoyed the knowledge that he'd managed to do that to Tony with just the touch of his hands. It made it that much hotter.

It doesn't matter. He needs to get over this crush.

But the truth is, his day was really shitty before he got to Tony's. The chatting is helping a little, but he's miserable. He'd gotten Nat's latest credit card bill – she's spent another $400 at the campus book store. He knows it's text books, he knows she's not spending money frivolously, but a part of him just wants to tell her to cool it. He wishes she'd buy used books, at least.

But Nat thinks there's money. She doesn't know her college fund has been gone for years. She thinks it's been sitting in the bank earning interest.

So he's stressed. And Tony is so nice. He's easy to talk to, and he seems genuinely interested. And his smile, when he lifts his head to give it, lights up the whole room.

That smile makes all the work worth every minute.

* * *

“He definitely likes men,” Tony says into the phone later that evening.

“What?”

Rhodey sounds awfully tired. Tony glances at the clock and then does a quick calculation on the time change to London, where Rhodey currently is.

“Sorry, were you sleeping?” he asks innocently.

“I hate you so much, Tony.”

“No, pumpkin, you love me. You know you do. Did you hear me, though? He definitely likes men.”

“Who likes men?” Rhodey asks with a heavy sigh.

“*Steve*,” Tony says, willing Rhodey to catch up already.

“Who?”

“Steve. The massage therapist? Remember? We talked about him, what three days ago? He definitely likes men.”

Rhodey clears his throat. “And how do you know this? Did you two...?”

“No. Jesus, Rhodey, no. I wish. No, we were talking and he was telling me about his friends, and – you know what, it doesn't matter. He said he dates men. That's the important takeaway here.”

“Didn't we talk about this, Tones? Couldn't he lose his license if things got inappropriate?”

“Only if somebody found *out,*” Tony reminds him.

“So, what, you want him to just give you a happy ending in your penthouse and then leave? Because if you actually wanna date this guy, you have to take him out. Where other people are.”

“So I'll do that!” Tony says, pouring himself a scotch. He takes a sip.

“You're Tony fucking Stark.”

“Yes I am,” he responds cockily.

He can almost hear Rhodey smacking his palm against his forehead.

“You walk out the door, and someone takes your picture. You walk out the door with man candy on your arm? Then 500 someones take your picture. You think that's not getting out there?”

Tony slugs back his glass and sighs. “I really, really like him,” he says, his voice smaller than he'd like.

“I don't know what to tell you, Tony. I know – I know it's hard. I know you want him. But it ain't happening here.”

Tony sighs.

“Can I go back to sleep now?”

Tony lets out a dry chuckle. “You and I both know you're not going back to sleep.”

Rhodey's turn to sigh. “No, you're right. But I can pretend.”

Tony's chuckle has a little more life in it this time.

“Thanks, Rhodey.”

“I *am* sorry, Tony.”

“I know. I appreciate that.”

He hangs up the phone and pours another drink. Tries not to think about dancing blue eyes and strong, warm hands.

* * *

Tony steps under the hot spray of the shower, and instead of turning the temperature down in an attempt to convince his body it doesn't want Steve, he lets his mind supply the imagery he's been trying to ignore for weeks. Strong, smooth hands touching every inch of his skin, piercing blue eyes staring intensely into his own, and soft, wet lips, parting in ecstasy, maybe stretched around his cock. His hand wraps a tight fist around himself, and he thinks of broad, thick shoulders. A narrow waist, curving out into a firm, round ass. His hand moves fast – he doesn't need to be fancy, he just needs to be *done*. So he keeps thinking of Steve, letting himself have the fantasy of that broad body hovering over him, oil-slick and tense and pushing into his body, or maybe turning him over and straddling him and sinking down onto his cock, or even just a strong, soft, oily hand wrapping around his cock instead of his own calloused one, jerking in the fast, tight rhythm and – Tony spills over his fingers, the spray coming from multiple shower heads quickly rinsing his release down the drain.

He drags in a deep breath and finishes washing, letting his heart slow and his body relax. He steps out of the shower and dries off with a fluffy towel, then slips into his sweat pants and moves to the living room to wait for Steve. He feels only mild guilt about the fact that he'd once again finished early in the workshop with the clear intention of masturbating in his shower before a massage appointment.

And after he greets Steve, and the session begins, and those broad, magical hands are working up his thighs and his lower back, Tony congratulates himself on his ingenuity, again. Because as wonderful, as amazing as Steve's hands may be, and as hot as he is, and as much as the very smell of him makes Tony's mouth water... he *is* nearing fifty, and his cock stays properly, considerately soft through the whole appointment.

* * *

Steve feels kind of like an idiot.

It had been a good appointment. He and Tony had chatted comfortably, and when he got lost in Tony's smooth skin, or Tony relaxed and lost his train of thought, the silences hadn't been awkward. They'd been comfortable. Even comfortable wasn't the right word. Maybe even *comforting*.

So he didn't have any complaints. If anything, it made his job easier. He didn't have the distraction of thinking about Tony like he'd – but it was better. It was better that Tony hadn't had any trouble rolling onto his back. That he'd simply shifted so Steve could work on his neck properly. That there'd been no telltale bulge under the sheet at Tony's groin.

He tells himself all of this on the train ride home. And even he's not convinced.

He knows he should be fine with it. Tony's lack of, well, a *natural response* to his touch shouldn't be disconcerting. His touch isn't meant to be sexual, he's a therapist for fuck's sake. If his touch *turns* sexual, or even sensual, he's officially crossing a line. One that can't be uncrossed.

He knows this. But still. It stings, a little. That Tony's reactions hadn't been about him. He should be glad that there isn't any attraction there, that Tony thinks of him as exactly what he is – a massage therapist. A healthcare professional. A hired service provider.

But still. His own body's, er, *natural response* to the light groans and pleasurable moans Tony let out every time Steve managed to locate and work out a tough knot makes the lack of reciprocity a lot to swallow.

Steve shakes his head a little, trying to change the track of his thoughts as he steps off the train and makes his way to the apartment. It's not far from the station, so it's a short walk. He checks the mail on his way up, but doesn't look through it until he makes it into the apartment.

It's empty – his anal retentive dry erase calendar on the kitchen wall tells him Clint is working tonight, so he assumes Bucky must be at the bar, too. He thinks of going to join them, but he's tired. And maybe a little bit depressed. Stupidly.

Instead, he leans his massage table up against the wall and sorts through the mail. Pulls out the bills addressed to him with a sense of dread. None of them are stamped Final Notice, though, so he just leaves them in a pile on his dresser and falls face first onto his mattress. He toes his shoes off and lets them drop to the floor, and wraps his arms around his pillow.

He falls asleep thinking of smooth, tanned skin that's warm under his hands, and warm, brown eyes that shine up at him.

* * *

“Have I mentioned I despise finals?” Nat tells him over the phone a few days later.

“It might have come up,” Steve answers, shifting in his seat. He's on the train, on his way to Stark Tower for his appointment with Tony. He's in a good mood, though he refuses to admit that it's because he'll be seeing Tony again in twenty minutes.

“Well, I meant it. Seriously, Steve. I'm going to drop out of law school and join a traveling circus.”

“What would you even do in a circus?”

“All those years of ballet can't be for nothing,” she tells him, and he can hear the laughter in her voice.

“Seriously, Nat. Are your tests going well?'

Nat sighs, and he can hear her shifting on her dorm bed. He can picture her laying there on her stomach, studying, knees bent up so her feet are idly kicking into the air.

“I think so. I won't see my grades for a few days yet, for most of them. But I think I aced my Torts final.”

“That's great, Nat. I'm really proud of you.”

Nat huffs, a sound that's a mixture of pleasure and modesty. “I'm just so tired of studying.”

“How many tests do you have left?”

“Just the two. One tomorrow, and then one on Friday afternoon.”

“Are you coming home Friday night then?”

Nat laughs lightly. The sound is like music, and Steve fills with pleasure at it. Nat's always been a serious girl, so when she's genuinely happy he can't help but match her mood.

“Actually, I'm going out with a couple of people from my classes on Friday. To celebrate, you know?”

“Sure. So Saturday morning?”

“What, do you miss me?”

“You know I do, Nat.”

Nat sighs. “You're such a sap, Rogers.”

“я люблю тебя.” *I love you.* He says it in Russian, their mother's native tongue. Natalya Romonova had been a tall, imposing woman, who insisted that her children learn how to speak Russian properly. In most things, she had conceded the Westernization of her family, in deference to their location, but on that she would not budge. And so, in their home, from the time they could speak, that had been the way to tell family you loved them. In Russian.

“That way, I know you mean it,” his mother had always said, with a soft smile. “If you have to think about how to say it, I know you really mean it.”

“я люблю тебя,” Nat answers, and he can hear the smile in the words. Her accent had always been better than his own.

“I'll see you on Saturday,” he says, disconnecting the call and slipping his phone back into his pocket. He's looking forward to having Nat home for a couple of weeks. He'll have to sleep on the couch, and let her have his room, but it's not a new situation for them. He doesn't mind, as long as he gets to see her.

He just wishes they could spend more time together over the break. He's got appointments through most of the holidays, and she'll be picking up shifts at the bar with Clint.

But they'll have some time. So at least there's that.

Steve drags himself out of his own thoughts and makes his way off the train, up the stairs and across the street toward Stark Tower. He clomps the snow and slush off his boots before he walks through the doors, and makes his way straight to the elevator – he'd been given a key card weeks ago to swipe so that the security guard wouldn't have to take the time. Steve assumes that he's quietly passed several background checks he wasn't aware of in order to gain the privilege.

He sets up his table, and greets Tony when he arrives from the bedroom, again damp from a shower. Privately, Steve grins to himself at the thought of Tony showering before every appointment so that he's clean and warm for Steve's touch. And, of course, the spicy, soapy smell of him is a welcome consequence.

Steve begins at Tony's legs, and firmly works at the sinewy muscles.

“I'll be out of town for a couple of weeks after this,” Tony says quietly from the table. “So we won't have any appointments until after New Year's.”

Steve's stomach drops with disappointment. He shouldn't be upset – it *is* the Christmas holidays. There's no reason to think Tony doesn't have anything better to do that hang out in his tower and get massages. That would be stupid.

Lovely, but stupid.

“Okay,” he says, knowing it's an inadequate response.

“I'm going to St. Lucia for the holidays.”

“Wow. That'll be nice.”

Tony chuckles, low in his throat. “Nicer than here, anyway. A lot less snow.”

Steve grins. “Are you going with family?”

“Friends,” Tony says. “There's no – I don't have any living family.”

“God, I'm sorry. That was insensitive.”

“No, no, it's fine. My parents died when I was a teenager. I've been on my own a long time.”

“Still,” Steve says, feeling all too self-conscious.

“I should bring *you* with me,” Tony pipes up from the table, and Steve tries not to clench his hands in surprise. He's not sure he succeeds.

“Excuse me?” He tries not to think about Tony on a beach, laid out nearly naked for him, in the sun. Skin warm and salty. Tries not to think about licking that salty taste off his –

“For massages. I mean, if I'm going to go and relax on a beach, I might as well *really* relax, you know?” Tony's words lilt on a laugh, and Steve's too busy blushing at his stupidity for jumping to conclusions to notice the way the muscles of Tony's shoulders bunch and tense.

“I don't –”

“I'm kidding, of course,” Tony says quickly, and Steve wonders if he's imagining the strain to his voice. “I mean, I obviously can't take you with me. You'll be with your family for the holidays.”

“Oh – oh, no. Actually, my – our parents passed away, too. A couple of years ago.”

“I'm sorry.”

“It's – it's fine. Well, it's not *fine*,” Steve says, cheeks flushed with nerves. “But it's fine. You know? So it's just me and Nat. We'll have dinner with Bucky's family on Christmas, but it'll be nice to just spend time with her.”

Steve swallows, willing himself to just stop rambling.

“That's nice. It sounds nice,” Tony says, finally. “Do you look alike? You and your sister?”

Steve chuckles lightly. “We're not *actually* – we're adopted. Both of us.”

“Oh,” Tony says, and Steve feels that hollow feeling he gets when he knows someone doesn't know how to respond, but he doesn't know how to make it better.

“Yeah. I was – my biological dad died overseas when I was just a baby. He was army. My mom died of TB when I was eight, and then the Romanovas adopted me. They already had Nat, but ... So we don't look alike. But it was nice, growing up with them. They were good people.”

“So your childhood was rough,” Tony says, voice tight and controlled.

“No, I wouldn't say that. Yeah, some of it was hard, but we grew up happy. And I get to have Nat as my sister.”

“That's good. Kids should feel loved,” Tony says quietly.

They don't say much else for the rest of the appointment.

* * *

Steve is hating knowing he won't see Tony for two weeks. He can't help but wonder what Tony's doing. If he's met some gorgeous guy on the beach – or girl, really, Tony's never said whether he was – but it doesn't matter, because in Steve's head, the images that torture him are of Tony with some tall, dark, mysterious man on the beach. Images of them kissing in the surf as the waves lap gently at their hips. Of salt, and sand, and sunshine and sex, and it's driving Steve insane.

That's how he knows he's really in trouble. He's well past infatuation. Way beyond a crush.

He knows he has to break it off. When Tony gets back. At their next appointment – he has to do it. He has to tell Tony that he's sorry, but he can't be his therapist anymore.

It's already causing a pit in his stomach, so he pushes it away and makes a concerted effort to enjoy the holidays with his sister. With Bucky, and Clint, and the Barnes family.

With *his* family.

* * *

Tony spends two weeks at a private beach villa in St. Lucia by himself. Pepper is with her family in the midwest, and Rhodey is back in London, liaising with the British army. Or something. Tony's not real clear on the details because Rhodey won't actually give him any.

But he hadn't been able to admit that to Steve – that he only has two real friends in the world, and he's not spending the holidays with either of them.

Not that they wouldn't. But he's turned down Pepper's invitation for eight years running, and Rhodey knows better than to even ask after thirty years of friendship.

So he spends his days puttering, and drinking, and throwing lavish parties with rich people he almost knows, and looking for all the world like he's having the time of his life. The tabloids all say so.

And at night, when he curls up alone in his wide, soft bed, he wishes he were wrapped up in strong, warm arms, surrounded by the scent of lemongrass massage oil.

He arrives home, tanned and tired and maybe a little hungover, on the fourth of January. He lets Pepper greet him with a buss on the cheek, and then asks her to call Steve's agency and see if he's free tomorrow to begin their regular schedule again.

Pepper studies him out of the corner of her eye, but doesn't make a comment. Tony had assumed Rhodey would have told her about his crush, but Pepper's not one to let Tony's idiotic decisions pass by without a *discussion*. He's surprised. And, if he's completely honest, a little disappointed. If anyone could talk some sense into him, he's sure it's Pepper.

Which is maybe why he doesn't tell her himself. She's already on the phone as she leaves the penthouse, booking his next appointment.

* * *

Steve doesn't want to be here. He's standing in front of the big glass doors at the entrance to Stark Tower. He's rooted to the spot on the sidewalk.

He had promised himself that this would be it. He would tell Tony at the end of this appointment that he's ending their professional relationship. Tony can't be his client, and he can't be Tony's therapist. Not when he feels this way. Not when he lives for these twice-weekly appointments, where he can see Tony and smell him and talk to him and touch him.

It's unprofessional, and it's not helpful. He needs to refocus on his goals. He has to put himself into his work and make sure he can afford Nat's tuition, and her textbooks and her dorm room and her meal card. He can't do all of that if all he can think of is the next time he's going to see Tony smile at him.

Steve takes a deep, cleansing breath. Another. A third, and he finally has the strength to step through the doors and head for Tony's personal elevator to the penthouse suite.

He exchanges pleasantries with Jarvis in the elevator and thinks, hysterically, that he's going to miss this, too. Chatting with an AI.

God. He should never have let it get this far. He has no one to blame but himself, really. He should have stopped after the first appointment. He'd known then that he was attracted to his client – if he'd just dealt with it then, maybe he could have asked Tony out – no, he wouldn't have. A guy like Tony Stark? Handsome playboy billionaire genius? Head of one of the most well-known tech companies in the world? That guy isn't agreeing to a date with an artist-turned-massage therapist who can't even pay his bills on time.

So then why don't you just keep him as a client, if nothing's going to happen anyway?

Steve ignores the voice in his head as he steps off the elevator. As tempted as he is, he knows he can't keep doing this to himself. It's distracting, and it's making him miserable.

A clean break is better.

He steps into Tony's suite, and today, Tony is waiting for him on the sofa. He's lounging with a StarkPad on his lap, fingers flying across the screen. Steve glances at his watch to make sure he's not late, but he's right on time.

Tony tosses the tablet onto the cushion and stands to greet him, sun-bronzed face splitting into a wide, joyful grin.

“Steve! You have a good Christmas?”

“Yeah, it was – fine. Did you? Enjoy St. Lucia?” Steve swallows around the lump in his throat. God, Tony's gorgeous. Steve's resolve wavers again.

Tony steps directly in front of him, crowding into his personal space as soon as Steve has deposited his duffel and mobile table onto the floor.

Steve takes a surprised step back, but Tony steps forward again, and Steve can feel the heat of him in such close quarters.

“Tony?” He's confused, and he can feel his stomach fluttering with nerves. “Are you okay?”

Tony looks at him for a moment, and Steve is tempted to learn forward and kiss him – but he won't. He can't.

Tony steps back, sighs. “Yes. Sorry. I'll – you can set up your table.”

Steve stares at him a moment longer, then begins setting up the massage table. He spreads the sheet and smooths it out, moves into the kitchen so Tony can get comfortable.

He feels as though his skin might be tingling. Like he's been shocked with electricity, and sparks are shooting along his nerve endings. Through his veins.

He tries to shake it off, and begins the massage. The heat of Tony's tanned skin does nothing to soothe him, of course.

As he spreads the lemongrass oil and works on muscles that, quite frankly, are tense but free of knots, his mind begins to wander.

Steve wonders what it would be like if he *could* have Tony. If they could go out together, and have a drink, or see a show, or have dinner. If their relationship were more than just client/therapist.

He wonders what Tony's skin would taste like.

He shakes away the thought and keeps working his hands. Can't stop himself from smoothing his palms down the planes of Tony's strong back, almost brushing against a hip, almost squeezing it. Thinks about the firm, attractive ass under the sheet. Wonders if Tony has tan lines from his trip.

He doesn't see any, of course, and that makes concentration harder still.

Steve wonders how much longer he'll be able to suffer this exquisite torture, as he lifts the sheet to allow Tony to roll over.

He drapes the sheet over Tony's body again, and his mind stutters, goes blank.

Tony is hard under the sheet. After weeks of – he's hard, from Steve's hands on his skin.

Steve's eyes dart up to meet Tony's, and Tony's gaze is calm. Expectant.

“I want to kiss you,” Tony says, and Steve's throat goes dry. Surely he's misheard. God, he wants this. But he can't have it, can he? He glances at Tony's soft-looking, pink lips, then back up at warm, intense eyes, staring at him.

“I don't – I can't –” Steve stutters out.

“Can I kiss you?” Tony asks, sitting up.

Steve swallows. His hands tremble. Once would be okay, wouldn't it? He could. Just once. He's going to end their arrangement anyway. Can't he have just one kiss first? He's allowed that much, isn't he?

His breath hitches, and he nods. Just once.

Once is all it takes – suddenly Tony's lips are on his. Tony burrows his hands into Steve's shirt, dragging his body closer. He expects the kiss to be rough, demanding, fierce, but the kiss is none of that. Tony's lips are eager, but soft. His lips are slick and hungry, but with a gentleness to them that forces a low sound from Steve's throat.

Tony swings his legs off the table so he has a knee on either side of Steve's hips, and his tongue flicks out to request entry. Steve opens his mouth with a groan, allowing the kiss to intensify further.

Then Tony's hands are sliding up his chest, to cradle his jaw, his face, and he changes the angle of their heads, deepening their kiss until it's all-consuming.

Steve dizzily wonders how he ever thought he could be satisfied with just one of these kisses.

* * *

Tony is dying. Of all the stupid, irresponsible – it doesn't matter. He's a headstrong bastard, and even though he's been telling himself for two weeks that he needs to get over his obsession with Steve, and try to remember that Steve is a hired professional and not here for Tony's sexual temptation, the sight of Steve's face flushed from the chill outside, and broad shoulders under a wool overcoat, had been enough to crush his willpower. So those strong hands across his skin, pressing into his muscles, worshiping his body? Tony would never have been strong enough to resist.

On the other hand, as disappointed in himself as he may be, he currently has Steve's lips under his, and Steve's body pressing forward against him, and Steve's gentle moans filling the atmosphere of his living room so... win win?

He wants to laugh, a little, as he stands up off the table and pushes Steve backwards toward the couch behind him. He won't break the kiss until he has to, but the truth is his knees are threatening to buckle, and his thighs are trembling, and he'd very much like to push Steve down onto the sofa and straddle his hips, so he does.

Tony's not feeling real big on impulse control at the moment.

Once he's settled on Steve's lap, sighs of pleasure escaping as Steve's hands wrap around his back to pull him in closer, he realizes Steve is wearing far too many clothes. Soft sweater and weird, pleated old man slacks – and Tony's just hanging out in his briefs, which aren't doing much to camouflage his erection.

So his hands go to Steve's belly, trying to paw at the sweater, trying to push it up and off, and Steve chuckles low in his throat before finally letting go of Tony to allow him to push the offending piece of clothing away.

Tony makes short work of Steve's undershirt, too, while he's at it, leaving them both bare from the waist up, skin to skin.

And oh, shit. He'd known Steve was a muscular guy. He couldn't look at that shoulder-to-waist ratio and not be painfully aware of the fact. But being faced with the smooth, rigid planes of muscle spread out before him like a goddamned buffet... not even in the same league as knowledge.

Tony explores with gentle touches, letting his hands roam and bump over biceps and triceps and pecs and lats and Jesus those abs – he starts nibbling his way down Steve's jaw, to his neck, teeth and tongue and lips exploring every millimetre of skin.

“Tony – God, Tony, we should... Jesus, we should stop,” Steve says, panting in Tony's ear.

Tony stops writhing in his lap, stops nibbling, stops caressing. Just holds very still for a moment, then lets out a forceful breath.

“If you want me to stop, Steve, I will,” he says, voice tightly controlled. “But I want this. Want you. I want you so much, and if you want me, too, then the only thing we *should* do is enjoy one another.”

And then he waits, and silently begs every deity that may or may not be listening to him to let him have this.

Have Steve.

He feels Steve swallow against his forehead, where Tony rests against his throat, and then swallow again.

“I do want this,” Steve says, quietly, his voice strained and almost – sad? “How could I not?”

Tony sits up straight, and looks up, searching Steve's eyes. He's not sure what he sees there, behind guarded lids.

“Then kiss me,” he invites, simply, making sure his mouth is within reach.

Steve hesitates for only a moment, and then he surges up to catch Tony's mouth in a kiss. It's frenzied this time, and wanton. Tony creaks out a moan, running his hands over Steve's chest and belly while Steve's own strong, oil-slick hands grab hold of his hips, the pads of his fingers digging not-so-gently into the muscle of his buttocks.

Tony can't stop himself from writhing a little on Steve's lap at the touch, rolling his hips down to try and get a little friction. He feels Steve's own answering erection in the bulge of his pants, and presses against it, thrilling at the whimper of pleasure it pulls out of the larger man.

Tony's fingers thread through Steve's hair, and he gathers as much as he can into a fist so he can pull Steve's head back, kiss-slick lips swollen and dark. Tony mouths and nips at Steve's jawline, down the strong column of his throat, to the soundtrack of Steve's harsh panting.

“God, Tony, your mouth,” he murmurs, blunt nails dragging at the skin of Tony's back, leaving trails through the massage oil. “I can't – I need –”

“Tell me what you need, Baby,” Tony whispers close to Steve's ear. “I'll give you anything you want.”

“I just want *you*,” Steve growls, and suddenly Tony's shoved up into the air as Steve surges to his feet, hands wrapped under Tony's thighs to keep him steady.

Tony has had many lovers. Tony's 'playboy' reputation is well-earned. Tony has never been with someone who could lift him with the ease that Steve is now.

He moans, the air rushing from his lungs as Steve deposits him back on the sofa, pushing him back and down, drifting over him and letting himself rest in the cradle of Tony's hips.

Tony can't help it, and his hands reach down, scrabbling to get trembling fingers around the button of Steve's pants, the zipper of his fly, trying to get more skin.

Steve lifts his hips to help, and after a moment, Tony is pushing pants and underwear down Steve's hips, his thighs, revealing what turns out to be a decently large, smooth, and very erect cock.

“God, you're gorgeous,” he breathes, hips bucking up. Steve flushes and then slips his fingers into the waistband of Tony's briefs, pushing at them until they're around Tony's knees as well.

Then a slippery hand is wrapping around Tony's cock, and Tony can only moan, his breath hitching.

Steve's mouth is on his again, and after the initial shock of that first perfect touch, Tony's own hands slide along Steve's skin, finally touching the velvety smooth skin of Steve's own cock, circling his thumb around the leaking tip.

* * *

“God, you feel good,” Tony says to him, and Steve's body trembles with want. He presses down into the tunnel Tony has created with his hand, lips catching Tony's again in a searing kiss.

He peppers kisses down Tony's throat, to his chest, finally, *finally* pursing his lips and tasting Tony's nipple. He worries at it with his teeth, gently, and moans in pleasure at the sound of Tony's breath rushing out of his lungs. He swipes his tongue over the little bud soothingly, then sucks it into his mouth again.

He can't help but thrust down a little when he feels the inside of Tony's thigh hitch up over his hip, wrapping itself around the back of Steve's leg.

Steve lifts dark eyes up to meet Tony's, and he's floored by the naked desire there. Tony's gaze is neither coy nor shuttered – his expression is open, and clearly telegraphing to Steve a message of hunger.

Steve greedily moves back up to Tony's mouth, trying to convey without words how deeply he wants this. Wants *him*.

When Steve breaks away for a breath, Tony's hands wander down to his hips, pulling him closer.

“I have condoms and lube in the bedroom,” Tony pants against Steve's neck, and Steve knows he should stop, knows he should stand up and walk away and do what's *right,* but he can't do it. All he can do is breathe in the slightly spicy, wild scent of Tony's skin, and gaze at his swollen, pink lips.

And nod his head.

Tony's suddenly pushing him back, up, away, and Steve immediately complies, worrying he's done something wrong, only to be surprised when Tony's hands grab his arms and pull him, walking quickly, through the living room and down the hall. They get to Tony's bedroom and Steve doesn't take much time to look around. He notices rich reds and golds in the bedding and accessories, and then Tony is pushing him back onto the mattress and straddling his hips, reaching into the bedside table for supplies.

“Want you in me so bad,” Tony murmurs before licking his tongue along the shell of Steve's ear, and Steve shudders.

His cock is heavy and eager, pressed up against the hot flesh of Tony's own arousal. Tony sits up straight over him, his hand coming back from the night stand with a small bottle of lubricant and a couple of condoms.

Steve chuckles as he takes the bottle, raising an eyebrow at what's left in Tony's hand.

“Feeling ambitious?” he asks with a grin.

Tony glances at his hand, then back at Steve. “Not gonna lie here, Babe, I might be having a little trouble counting past zero at the moment.”

Then Tony's mouth is on his again, and Steve rolls them so he can slide down Tony's body, his lips leaving a hot trail down smooth skin, and the compact ridges of Tony's abdomen.

He dips his tongue into Tony's navel as he goes by, and Tony lets out a hiss. The sound transforms into a low moan as Steve nips a gentle bite into Tony's hip bone before pushing his thighs up and open.

Steve dribbles a bit of the lube onto his fingers, pressing a wet, open mouth against the tender spot where Tony's thigh meets his groin, and laves it with his tongue while he runs a slick finger against the ridge of Tony's opening.

“You sure about this, Tony?” he asks, pulling his head up and making a small, gentle circle with his finger.

Tony blinks at him for a moment, then lets out a bark of laughter.

“Seriously, Steve, get in me. Right fucking now.”

Steve gently presses his fingertip in, the tight heat of Tony's body drawing a moan out of his chest. Tony gasps, and once Steve's finger has gone all the way in to the knuckle, he gently draws it back before pressing it in again.

“Oh, fuck, that's good,” Tony whispers, and Steve grins a little to himself before lifting himself up on his elbow to place his mouth over the tip of Tony's cock.

He hears, but does not react to, Tony's strangled yelp, concentrating on the musky, slightly bitter taste of the droplets of fluid he tongues up from the slit, before pressing forward and down, revelling in the slide of Tony's cock between his lips as his finger presses into his body again.

He feels a strong, shaking hand work its way into his hair, clenching at the strands. Tony's hand doesn't push or guide, it just holds Steve, grounding him.

Steve hums with pleasure as he presses a second finger in beside the first, keeping up the slow, gentle slide, scissoring his fingers a little when he pulls back and presses in again.

His mouth moves up and down Tony's cock, saliva and pre-come mixing to ease any friction.

Tony's whole body shivers, and the fingers in his hair tighten rhythmically.

“Jesus, you better not take your time here, Gorgeous, or I'm just going to – fuck – come on your fingers,” Tony groans, hips making abortive forward and backward movements, as though he can't quite figure out which direction he wants to push into.

Steve lifts his mouth up off Tony's erection with a hum, nibbling at Tony's hipbone again while he presses a third finger in, his other hand coming up to squeeze a handful of Tony's ass cheek.

“I'm ready, please, Steve, I'm ready, just –” Tony's hand is holding out a condom, and with one more lick to the delicate skin below Tony's navel, Steve slowly pulls his fingers out, watching hungrily as Tony's body attempts to clutch back at them, and Tony whines at the loss.

With shaking hands, Steve puts the condom on and wipes a little more lube over the tip of his straining erection, then lets the tip just rest at Tony's entrance.

The ridge spasms against him as Tony tries to pull him in, and with a groan, Steve slowly, but steadily, breaches Tony's body, marvelling in the way it stretches around him.

“Fuck, fuck, yes, fuck,” Tony chants, barely audible, fingers scraping at Steve's back.

Steve holds his breath until his hips are flush with Tony's, then lets it out in a rush, the sigh tapering into a moan.

He intends to take a moment, get used to the tight grip of Tony's furnace-like body around him, but then Tony's hips are thrusting up at him, trying to start a rhythm, and Steve's body responds of its own accord.

He sets a strong tempo, the slick slide of Tony's tight channel making him gasp.

Tony's hips meet him thrust for thrust, Tony's hard cock sliding between their bellies. Steve shifts his angle a little, and Tony cries out as Steve manages to hit his prostate. He grips Tony's hips so he can keep thrusting at the same spot, all too aware that the noises Tony is making, mixed with the feeling of his body under him, around him, is going to push him over the edge far too soon.

Tony's nails scratch at his back, his legs wrapped around Steve's hips and ankles locked behind him. Tony's constant litany of curses and encouragement devolve into a high keening noise, and Steve puts a little more strength into his thrusts.

Tony cries out with each one, then clenches and spasms around Steve's cock, impossibly hot and tight, and hot fluid hits his belly, as Tony comes between them. Tony lets out a sob of air as Steve hits his prostate again, and again and again, oversensitive body riding waves of aftershocks, before Steve's hips stutter, his body goes rigid, and he empties himself into the condom, his vision whiting out with pleasure.

After a moment, Steve pulls out, slowly and carefully, before flopping to the mattress beside Tony with a groan.

As Steve is trying to bring his brain back online, trying to remember his own name, for example, Tony lets out a hysterical giggle.

Still breathing hard, Steve glances over at him, one eyebrow quirking up in question.

Tony snorts out another laugh. “It's like I live in porn now. Dear Penthouse,” he says through his giddiness “my massage therapist –”

Steve doesn't even hear the end of the sentence. Reality crashes back into his awareness. His ears are a rush of white noise as he realizes – *remembers* – what he's done.

Oh shit shit shit, he stutters in his mind. He needs this job. He needs to *keep his license*. This was so wrong. Beyond wrong, what Steve had done here, with Tony, is *illegal.* Yes, it had felt good. Amazing, even. Actually, Steve's not even sure there's a word for how it had felt but – it doesn't matter. It doesn't *matter* how it felt, or how Steve feels. What matters is Nat's tuition. Jesus. $80,000 per year, and he's going to throw all that away for a fuck?

He's already rushing through putting his clothes back on, collecting his table, his bag – nothing's put away where it's supposed to be but he's got it all into a state in which he can carry it, and that's all that matters.

“Steve? What's going on?” Tony asks, and by the tone of his voice, Steve thinks maybe it's not the first time he's asked the question, but Steve hadn't heard him.

“I have to – Tony, I'm so sorry, you can't tell *anyone* about this, *please*.”

“Excuse me?”

“I could – Jesus, I could lose my license. I could go to *prison*. Fuck, fuck, I shouldn't have –”

“Steve, honey, it's okay,” Tony says, trying to lay a reassuring hand on Steve's arm, but Steve jerks back as though he's been burned.

“I have to – fuck, I have to go. I shouldn't have done this. I'm so sorry.”

Steve rushes to the elevator doors, and doesn't look up to meet Tony's stricken expression.

Jesus, what has he done?

* * *

Tony's not really sure where he went wrong, here. He'd thought Steve was into it. He seemed to be enjoying himself. Tony had even thought there was more to the whole thing than fucking. There may have even been *feelings* involved.

So, he thinks he'll give Steve a few days to wrap his head around it, maybe get over whatever panicky anti-commitment moment he'd had, and when Steve comes over next, they can discuss it like adults.

He'd prefer to just have more sex, but he's willing to talk, first.

So, when his regular Tuesday massage appointment comes and goes with no massage therapist, he spends his evening pacing in his apartment. He snarls at Pepper, the next day, more than once, and she asks him what bug has crawled up his ass, and he almost giggles.

He pours some whisky into his coffee, and tells her he needs her to call the massage service and have Steve sent over this evening.

“I'll pay extra for the short notice, I don't give a fuck. Just get him here.”

“Are you okay? Did you hurt yourself?”

Tony can't deal with Pepper's genuine concern, so he just waves a hand at her dismissively.

“Just get it done,” he snaps.

He's nearly vibrating with nerves when it gets to be 7 o'clock, pacing his suite. Finally, the elevator doors swing open and Tony's across the room like a shot, ready to pull Steve into his arms, ready to jump into his lap, something.

But Steve's not in the elevator. A relatively tall, dark-haired woman with a rather impressive bustline is in the elevator instead.

“Who the fuck are you?” Tony blurts out.

“Um... I'm Darcy? The massage therapist. You know, the one you called and made a really expensive appointment with?”

“You're not *my* massage therapist.”

The woman, Darcy, shrugs, unconcerned as she hitches her mobile table up over her shoulder. “Hey, I just go where they send me, Mr. Stark. Where should I set up?”

“You're not – where's Steve?”

Darcy narrows one eye at him. “Don't know. Maybe he's not feeling well. What I *do* know is that I am a massage therapist, and my calendar says Mr. Stark requested a massage.”

Tony pinches the bridge of his nose, his other arm wrapped around his ribcage.

“I don't want – I think there's been a mistake. I was trying to make an appointment with my regular massage therapist.”

“So, you *don't* want a massage? Because, dude, let me tell you, I rode the train for an hour to get here. I thought I was going to an appointment and getting paid. A cancellation *five minutes after the appointment is supposed to start* is not kosher.”

“I'm – look, I'll still pay, I don't care. But we're not having an appointment. You need to leave.”

Darcy glares at him for a minute, then turns and moves back into the elevator.

“Your loss, buddy.”

The doors close, and Tony drops his chin to his chest.

Yes. It is.

* * *

Steve is curled up on the sofa, clutching a pillow to his belly while the television blares something at him. He thinks it might be Simpsons reruns, but he honestly hasn't been paying much attention.

Bucky plops down on the end in front of Steve's feet, and tosses another throw pillow at Steve's head.

“Get up,” Bucky says, his voice stiff.

“I'm fine here,” Steve mumbles.

“Oh my God, Stevie, get up.”

“I don't have to leave for work for at least an hour,” Steve argues.

“Steve, get up.”

Steve glares mutinously at his best friend, knowing he's acting like a child and just not mustering the energy to give a shit.

From out of nowhere (or possibly from behind his back), Bucky pulls out a non-descript bakery box. Steve's eyes widen.

“Are those eclairs? From Oma's bakery?” Steve finds himself rapidly sitting up.

Bucky holds the box just out of reach.

“If you get up off the couch, you may smell my eclairs,” he says haughtily.

Steve lurches forward and tries to grab for the box, but even though he's stronger than Bucky, Bucky is a little faster and manages to evade him.

“And if you *shower*,” Bucky continues, standing and moving away from the sofa, “you may *eat* one.”

Steve lifts an arm and sniffs exaggeratedly.

“I smell fine,” he says, glaring.

Bucky snorts out a laugh. “For about two more hours, and then you're going to get ripe,” he says. “Seriously, Steve, I can't remember the last time you pulled the angsty teenager act. You weren't even *dating* anyone.”

Steve sighs, and reaches for the box of eclairs. Bucky doesn't pull it out of reach this time, just also plucks one out of the box and takes a bite.

Steve lets the cream sit on his tongue for a moment, then sighs, swallowing.

“I know. It's not about that. I'm just worried.”

“Yeah, you said. Your license, your job.” Bucky shakes his head. “You really think this guy would report you?”

Steve sighs. “It doesn't matter. I'm supposed to be a professional. I can't ... be someone who would take advantage of somebody like that. He's a client. Was a client.”

“Thought you said *he* came on to *you*?”

“Well, yeah, technically. But –”

“Look, Stevie, I think you're being too hard on yourself,” Bucky says, licking chocolate from his index finger. “You're both adults. You said this guy was older than you, and rich, and kind of famous. If anything, he took advantage of you.”

Steve places what's left of his eclair on the coffee table, scrubbing his clean hand over his face.

“I can't lose my job, Buck. You know how bad I need this.”

Bucky leans back and puts his feet up on the coffee table.

“But you don't have to do it all alone, Stevie. You know I can help you with Nat's tuition.”

“No. Bucky, no, we've talked about this.”

“Yeah, and I told you she's like a sister to me, too.”

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose and stands up, heading for the shower. He has to leave for a massage appointment soon.

“Drop it, Buck,” he growls. His tone softens. “Please.”

Bucky lets out a loud sigh as Steve leaves the room.

“If you like this guy that much, Stevie...” he trails off.

Steve doesn't answer.

* * *

Tony can't convince the massage service to give him Steve's home phone number. He's not even having Pepper make the calls anymore, he's doing it himself. At first, he'd been trying to make sure Steve was the therapist that would come to his penthouse, but the woman on the other end has not been cooperative.

Even with his most CEO-Stark-do-as-I-say-or-perish voice, he can't get anyone to give him an answer. Just a bunch of bullshit about privacy concerns.

Tony is not interested in privacy concerns.

He knows that what he and Steve shared that night was more than just chemistry. They had danced around it for months, but Steve's lips on his, Steve's body under his, over his – that was fucking angels singing, and Tony's not ready to let it go.

He just needs to know where Steve is.

So, Tony Stark does what Tony Stark does best – whatever he fucking wants.

He hacks into the therapy service's employment records. It's criminal how easy it is to do, how easy it would still be if he wasn't a tech genius. It's child's play, is what it is.

He makes a note to tell Pepper to send over one of their computer security guys over there with a sales pitch or something, because Christ, it makes him want to weep.

Back to his task at hand, he finds it. Steve Rogers. There's a phone number and a listed address in Brooklyn.

He thinks about calling, but the truth is, it's too easy to hang up on someone.

He wants Steve to tell him to his face why he hasn't come back. Why he ran away. Why he doesn't want to be with Tony.

He wants a chance to change his mind.

* * *

Clint is happy to be out of the apartment. He wasn't even supposed to work tonight, but if he has to be around Steve's sad sack mope fest for much longer, he thinks he might actually kill him. He's not sure how – knife, gun, fucking bow and arrow, it doesn't matter. What matters is that if he has to deal with it anymore, he's going to lose his shit.

He's not even sure he gets it. Steve had told them he'd slept with a client, and was worried about his job. That, Clint gets, sure. But the moping – God. Clint had asked him, and Steve had *said* it was good. That this guy – Tony, or whatever – was a good lay. Well, he hadn't said it like *that*, but Clint is used to bringing Steve's flowery language back down to layman's terms.

The point is, Steve said it was good. That Tony hadn't done anything untoward. That they'd both had a good time.

So Clint's not sure what the problem is. Yeah, illegal – but only if someone tells, right? Only if it's reported. And Steve *obviously* likes the guy, and generally Steve's a pretty good judge of character. So if it's the kind of guy Steve likes, then why would he expect Tony to rat him out?

It doesn't make any fucking sense.

Steve hasn't really told Clint and Bucky much about his client. He's respected the client confidentiality thing, if not the no-hanky-panky rule. God, Clint had sort of thought that if Steve finally got laid it would put him in a *better* mood. He'd maybe be less stressed. This is so much worse.

Anyway. All Steve told them is that the guy's name is Tony, and he's rich. He'd been hedgy about the whole thing, and then Steve had gotten wasted, and spent the last four days in a sulk of truly epic proportions.

So, as Clint is is on his way to the bar where he works, trying to sling his bag over one shoulder with one hand, and the other hand trying to get his hearing aid in, he's only slightly surprised to almost walk head on into Tony fucking Stark, one of the more recognizable faces in New York, on the sidewalk directly in front of the main doors.

Clint's a smart guy. If a rich man named Tony is standing in front of their building, in front of a fancy black car with a goddamned chauffeur in the front seat, Clint can fit the pieces together.

So Clint stops, and looks Stark up and down, head to toe. Twice.

“Can I help you with something?” he asks, crossing his arms and not moving from in front of the door. He tries, and succeeds, to sound decidedly unhelpful.

* * *

Tony glares back at the blond with the intense biceps. This guy is all biceps. Biceps and a sour scowl.

“Looking for a friend,” he says. Fuck this guy. Who the fuck is this guy?

“Your friend live here?”

“I think so,” Tony says, trying to move past Bicep guy. He doesn't move.

“You think so? Or you know so?”

Tony narrows his eyes. “I think I know so.”

He sees Bicep guy's lip twitch, trying to hold back a smile. One point to Tony.

“So who's your friend?” Bicep guy asks.

“I'm not sure that's any of your business,” Tony says.

Bicep guy shrugs. “You wanna get in the building? It's my business.”

“What are you, security?” Tony suddenly realizes he should have thought of that. Doormen on the upper east side tend not to be so hostile, but maybe in Brooklyn things are different.

Bicep guy laughs. Actually guffaws.

“Bro,” he says through his hysterics, “We're in Brooklyn. There's no doormen in this part of Brooklyn.”

Tony glares, then shoulders past Bicep guy toward the door, and hits the buzzer for apartment 342. “Then I guess you can't stop me.”

The speaker clicks on, and Tony feels the first hint of nerves.

“Clint? Did you forget your key?”

Tony steps back, away from the unfamiliar voice. Glances back at Bicep guy.

Steve had once told him a story about his roommates. Bucky and Clint. And Bicep guy is smirking at him as he looks back and forth between the intercom speaker and ... well, and Clint.

“Fuck,” he sighs.

Clint just keeps smirking at him.

“Clint?” comes from the speaker.

“It's okay, babe,” Clint says, loud enough for the mic to pick up his words.

“So,” Tony starts, with a sheepish grin. “That friend of mine definitely lives here.”

Clint raises his eyebrows and Tony sighs.

“Look, man, is Steve here, or not?”

“Why?”

“I need to talk to him.”

“What for? How does he know you?”

“I'm a client –”

“Then you definitely shouldn't know where he lives. He sure as fuck wouldn't have told you.”

Tony can't shake the feeling Clint knows more than he's letting on. “He didn't *exactly* tell me.”

“You a stalker?”

Tony gives him a look. “If I were a stalker, would I say yes?”

“Point.”

“Look, I just need to talk to him. Can you just go up and tell him I'm here?”

“No way, man. I'm already late. You ring the buzzer.” And Clint hustles down the street, pulling his phone out of his pocket as he walks.

* * *

Steve gets a text from Clint. *Tony Stark in front of building, buzzing apt*. He finishes reading just as the buzzer goes off. He has a fleeting moment of anticipation before his stomach drops to the floor.

Bucky beats him to the door, and presses the intercom button.

“Clint? That you, babe?”

A cough comes through the speaker. “No, it's – is Steve there?”

Bucky's eyes narrow at Steve, who's come to the intercom to ... he's not sure what. Fidget? Panic?

“Who's asking?”

“My name is Tony. I'm a ... friend.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow at Steve, who sighs and motions him away.

Bucky swings his prosthetic arm wide in invitation toward the intercom controls. Steve clears his throat and hits the button again.

“I'll be down in a minute, Tony.”

He's inordinately proud of himself for the fact that his voice came out strong and clear.

“This the guy?” Bucky asks as Steve slips into his shoes. He slips a coat over his shoulders. “You're not gonna invite him up? It's January.”

“I know. This won't take long.”

“Steve, if you *like* him –”

“Bucky, stop. It doesn't matter. I can't do this. I'm just going to go down and tell him that, and then I'm coming back up. It won't take long.”

“You're an idiot, Punk.”

“Not the first time you've told me that, Jerk,” he responds, almost by rote, as he slips out the door and down the hall toward the stairs.

* * *

Tony has to swallow hard when Steve comes out the building's door, cheeks pink, soft sweatpants and a T-shirt under his coat.

It's a comparatively warm day for January, but Tony can still see gooseflesh raise on Steve's neck. He wants to run his tongue along it.

“You're a hard man to get a hold of,” Tony says, turning on his most flirtatious thousand-watt smile.

“What are you doing here?” Steve responds, jaw twitching.

Tony falters. He had thought Steve would be at least a little pleased to see him. Happy he'd made the effort.

“I want to talk.”

“We don't have anything to talk about,” Steve says, crossing his arms in front of his magnificent chest.

Tony snorts out a laugh, putting his hands in the pockets of his jeans with deliberate nonchalance. “I kind of think we do.”

“Look, Ton – Mr. Stark,” Steve starts.

“Excuse me?” Suddenly, Tony is livid.

Steve takes a deep breath and starts again. “I'm sorry, Mr. Stark, but I behaved –”

“No fucking way. Nope. You don't get to put your *dick* inside me and then call me *Mr*. Stark like I'm a fucking *stranger*, Rogers,” Tony says, pointing a hostile finger at Steve's chest as

he takes a step forward.

“I think it's best if we –”

“Jesus Christ, just fucking *stop* already,” Tony says, exasperated. He takes a calming breath, and tries again with a gentler tone. “Look, Steve, I've been trying to call you, but no one would give me your number. I want to talk about what happened.”

Steve won't meet his eyes. “I can't. Mr. St – Tony, I *can't*.”

“Did I do something? Did I – I can be an asshole sometimes, I know, but if I did something to – to hurt you...”

Steve lets out a brittle laugh.

“Tony, this job is – it's all I've got. What I did – I took advantage of you. I'm a healthcare professional. If someone found out about what we – what *I* did, I could lose my license. I could get fired. Shit, I could go to jail. And I can't – I *need* this job. I need the money.”

“That's the problem? *That's* the problem? Jesus – Steve, I could buy your whole company with what's in my wallet right now – well, not really, I don't actually carry cash, but you know what I mean. This is easy! I can just hire you! You could be my personal massage therapist, and there's no one to report you to, and –”

Steve's eyes darken dangerously, his jaw clenching.

“I'm not a whore, Tony. You can't just *buy* me. We made a mistake, and it's done now,” he says, his voice cold.

Tony feels like he can't get enough air. “It wasn't a mistake, Steve. It *wasn't*. You know it wasn't.”

“Yes, it was.”

“It didn't *feel* like a mistake,” Tony says, his voice quieter now.

“It doesn't matter how it felt,” Steve says, his face softening. Tony thinks maybe his eyes look a little sad. “It doesn't matter. It stops now, all of it. I have to – I have to go get ready for work. Please don't – don't come here again.”

“Steve...” Tony says, almost putting a hand out, trying to reach for Steve as he moves back toward the door.

“Tony, please,” he says, his voice strained. Tony watches as, with one last glance back, Steve goes into the building, letting the doors close behind him.

Tony stands there for a few minutes, staring after him and unable to breathe, before he turns and goes back to the car, where Happy is waiting to drive him home.

Summer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony bobs his head to the pounding rock music coming from his workshop's surround sound speakers, soldering iron working in one hand while the other holds the piece of tech he's working on steady.

He squints, the connection in front of him starting to blur a little. He wonders how long he's been working down here, but doesn't break long enough to glance at the clock.

He manages to contact his thumb with the iron, and jerks back at the pain, sucking the offended digit into his mouth to soothe it.

He blinks and glances up, to see Rhodey sitting across the workbench, staring at him.

“Jesus. When did you get here?”

Rhodey raises an eyebrow. “I've been sitting here for forty-five minutes, Tony. I wanted to see how long it took you to notice me.”

“You have a serious problem,” Tony says with a glare, as Rhodey reaches forward and snatches the soldering iron out of his hand. “Hey!”

“Turns out, it took you forty-five minutes.”

“Jarvis didn't announce you,” Tony points out.

“As a matter of fact, Sir, I did announce Colonel Rhodes' presence,” Jarvis pipes up from the ceiling, turning Tony's music volume down.

“Liar,” Tony spits.

“Twice,” Jarvis counteracts.

Tony glares at the ceiling once for good measure, then turns his attention back to Rhodey.

“So, then, what can I do for you, Pumpkin Spice?”

“You're going to put down your toys, you're going to go upstairs and shower, and then you and I are going out. Where the people are.”

“Oh, no. I have a deadline. Ask Pepper. She'll tell you.”

“I *talked* to Pepper, Tony. She said you haven't been out of the tower for six weeks.”

“I don't *need* to leave the tower. I have everything here – I can teleconference my meetings that can't come to me, I have my workshop and my suite, and there's booze upstairs, we can drink there.”

“Oh, I already *know* you can drink there. You have done a spectacular job of proofing you can drink there. This shit has been going on for six months, Tony.”

“There's no *shit* going on,” Tony argues, crossing his arms. “I just haven't needed to leave.”

“Don't argue with me, Stark. It's time to move on. I know the masseuse thing messed with your head, but –”

“Massage therapist.”

“What?”

Tony sighs, a sad smile creeping up on his face. “Or at least masseur.”

Rhodey just looks at him for a moment, as though trying to figure out if he's serious.

“Never mind,” Tony says, standing up. He stretches, his back popping. He hasn't had a massage in six months. “I'll shower, we'll go out, we'll drink.”

Rhodey blinks, as though surprised at the ease with which he's getting his way. Tony doesn't point out that *he's* also getting *his* way – and *his* way happens to be drunk.

They go to a little bar in Brooklyn. It looks like a dive on the outside, but the interior is clean, with warm lighting and stained glass candle holders that make it look dated. It's the middle of July, and the air conditioning appears to be functional, so as far as Tony's concerned, it's currently the best bar in the city.

He slips into a comfortable booth and Rhodey slides in across from him.

When Tony and Rhodey go out, as infrequent as it may be these days, they like to go to little out-of-the-way places where the paparazzi won't find him. If they go to upscale places that care about celebrities, the press will find him. If they go to little dive bars where the clientele don't care about notability, Tony can get drunk in peace.

And he intends, now, to get *very* drunk in peace.

A stunning redhead comes over with a couple of menus, and the logo on the front proclaims 'Phil's!' in big red letters beside a weird, minimalist eagle logo.

“Can I get you boys a beer to start?” she asks, pouty lips forming into a small smile.

Tony knows he should hit on her. And he probably will, later. For right now, though, he just wants a drink, and to stop thinking about Steve.

“Scotch and soda,” he says with a nod and a grin he doesn't feel in his eyes. “Maybe make it a double. Maybe even feel free to go light on the soda.”

She gives him a look, then turns to Rhodey.

“You got an IPA on tap?” Rhodey asks her, glancing down at his menu.

“Sure do,” she tells him with a curt nod.

“One of those, then, please.”

“Hipster,” Tony accuses, bouncing his leg under the table.

“Shut up and read your menu,” Rhodey says, not missing a beat. “I mean, you're really going to get drunk on scotch?”

“Been working for me so far,” Tony says, cringing inwardly a little at the admission. He probably has been drinking too much the last few weeks, and if the look Rhodey gives him is any indication, he thinks so, too.

The waitress comes back with their drinks a few minutes later, and Rhodey glances up at her.

“What would you recommend?” he asks her, waving at the menu.

“Depends how hungry you are,” she says.

“Well, Miss, we're going to be drinking heavily soon, so we probably don't want anything too complicated. Or too vegetarian,” Tony tells her, grinning up.

Red smirks, and places her hands on her hips. “Well, it's Wednesday, so wings are half price. And we have the best wings this side of Manhattan.”

Tony raises an eyebrow. “Ambitious promises.”

“Oh, but we live up to the hype. You should try the chili lime – or the dill pickle.”

Tony and Rhodey share a glance, and Rhodey shrugs. Tony is pretty sure Rhodey's faking the slightly resigned sag of his shoulders.

“How about a dozen of each?”

“A dozen chili lime and a dozen dill?” she replies with a smile.

“No, no. A dozen of each flavour that you have.”

Red stares at him. “Excuse me?”

Tony shrugs up at her. “Can't very well declare them the best wings this side of Manhattan if I haven't tried every kind.”

“We have seventeen flavours of wings.”

“That sounds excellent,” Tony says, handing Red their menus haughtily. “I look forward to sampling them.”

Red stares for another moment, then takes the menus with a smirk.

“And, Red?”

She turns back around.

“If you keep my glass full tonight, I will tip you an exorbitant amount. It will be obscene, I promise.” Tony gives her a wink, and she rolls her eyes as she walks away.

She does, however, earn the promised tip, and when, hours later, Rhodey pours Tony into the back of his Town Car with Happy's help, Red's standing at the bar's door, giving him a smug wave as he flops across the seat.

* * *

Steve supposes he should have expected this. Maybe some small part of him always had, but he'd pushed it down and ignored it to the point that when the moment finally comes, it takes him by surprise.

It's summer, and Nat's out of classes until September, so she's back in New York, staying with them. Steve's moved out to the couch so she can have a bedroom, and she spends most of her nights working down at the bar with Clint. He's glad to have her home, because yeah, he'd missed her. However, he won't miss the couch, or his forced clandestine activities.

Clandestine activities such as constant vigilance in getting to the mail before anyone else, so he can sort out his bills into secret piles – 'Past Due', 'Really Past Due', and 'Mack The Knife is Going To Break Your Legs Past Due'.

But today, Nat's expecting correspondence regarding her dorm situation, and she bounds down the stairs and checks the box while Steve's out at a client's.

He comes home to find her sitting on the couch, beside his pillow and folded up blanket, stacks of bills fanned out on the coffee table in front of her.

“Where did you get those?” he asks. He knows it's not the right question – he knows exactly where she got them.

“You know where.”

Yeah. In the drawer at the bottom of the end table beside the sofa, under the stack of outdated magazines.

“It's not –”

“Stop. Don't lie to me, Steve. Never to me.”

Steve sits beside her, staring at his hands dropped down between his knees. He doesn't say anything.

“How long has – where's the money, Steve?”

“There is no money,” he says, his voice quiet.

Nat waits. He can't meet her eyes.

“There wasn't – before the accident. Dad wasn't working. He'd been laid off, and he didn't tell Mom,” he says, staring at his hands. He feels her body stiffen beside him. “He cleaned out your college fund. He didn't – he had to. And I didn't *sell* the house, the bank took it. There was nothing left.”

“Steve –”

He can't take the hitch in her voice, and he stands, crossing the room to stare out the window.

“Why didn't you tell me?” she finally says, after a moment.

Steve shrugs. “How could I?”

“I could have – Steve, you know I would have –”

“Would have what? Not gone to school? Put off your dream? How could I do that to you, Nat? It's all you ever wanted.”

“And it could have waited. I could have applied for more aid, or student loans. I could have worked more.”

“And your grades would have suffered. Nat, this was too important. You're just a kid, you shouldn't have to worry about this stuff.”

“Jesus, Steve. I'm not that much younger than you.”

“I didn't want you to have to worry. I wanted you to have the life you deserve,” he tells her, finally turning to meet her eyes.

“And what about you?” she says, eyes flashing dangerously. “You're going to work yourself to the bone, hiding bills in drawers and ruining your credit? Bury yourself in stress and worry? How is that helping me?”

He shrugs, a wry smile crawling across his face. “When you're a big shot lawyer, I can come ask you for money.”

She glares at him for a moment, then throws a pillow at his head. It hits with deadly accuracy.

“You're an ass. You know that, right?”

He sighs, relaxing at the sound of amusement in her tone. “Don't talk to your big brother that way.”

She sighs, waving a hand at the stacks of bills.

“So what are we going to do here?”

Steve shrugs. “I've got a line on a couple of odd jobs, and I'm taking lots of appointments this summer. It'll be fine.”

She glares. “I'll call the bar and see if I can take some extra shifts.”

“It's summer, Nat. You should be enjoying your last summer of freedom before you have to join the working world next year.”

“Oh, we're not arguing about this. I understand why you were dumb, but you don't get to be dumb anymore,” she says, crossing the room and placing a hand gently on his cheek. “I'm taking extra shifts, and I'm giving you my tip jar.”

“Nat –”

“Seriously, Steve. We're not arguing about this. It's *my* education, there's no reason I can't pay for some of it.”

Steve glares down at her for a moment, but the truth is, he's not sure he can take her in a fight. His baby sister's definitely tougher than he is. Faster, too.

He sighs. “You forgive me?” he finally asks.

She squeezes his face in her hand, maybe a little too sharp. “Course I do. You're an idiot, but I love you anyway.”

“я люблю тебя,” he says, breaking out the Russian. So she'll know how much he means it. He says it again, more fiercely this time. “*я люблю тебя.*”

She just wraps her arms around his waist in a hug. “Идиот,” she answers. *Idiot*.

* * *

“It's Wednesday,” Tony says into the phone when Rhodey answers, not bothering with a greeting.

“Am I supposed to know what that means?” Rhodey says with a sigh.

“It's Wednesday, and I want wings.”

“O...kay?” Rhodey sounds wary.

“Happy will swing by and get you, and then we're going to that little place in Brooklyn.”

“All the way out to Brooklyn?”

“They have the best wings on the planet, Rhodey, and you know it,” Tony says, leaning back in his seat and brushing a bit of lint off his jeans.

“While I'm not arguing the point, are we really going to go all the way to Brooklyn for wings?”

“And also alcohol.”

“Tony,” Rhodey starts gently, but with a tone of admonishment.

“Beer. I'm not – I'm doing better.”

“We went out a week ago, and I had to drag you to the car, and up to your suite, and you were wasted.”

“I was. That's true. All of it. But I haven't had the hard stuff since then.”

Rhodey pauses. “Yeah?”

“Promise. I'm doing better. You were right. I can't keep pining after some guy I only knew for a couple of months. We only slept together once. I'm moving on.”

“Good. Tony – that's good. I'm proud of you.”

“So, wings,” Tony says, shrugging off the uncomfortably tender feeling niggling between his shoulder blades. “Say yes.”

Rhodey sighs. “Fine. Wings. And beer.”

“I Promise.”

“Okay. How long will it take Happy to get over here? An hour?”

“He's already parked in front of your building. And I'm in the back seat. So get your ass down here.”

“What if I'd said no?” Rhodey asks, chuckling.

Tony snorts. “You can't resist me.”

Rhodey comes down a few minutes later, and Happy drives them to Phil's again. The three of them slide into the same booth Tony and Rhodey had sat in the week prior, and Red is instantly beside their table.

“Hey, boys. Back again, I see.”

“Oh, we're about to become regulars,” Tony says, winking at her. “Can't go more than a week without the best wings in the city.”

“What'd I tell you?” she asks, cocking a hip.

“You told us you had the best wings outside of Manhattan. But I think you were selling them short,” he says.

She laughs, the sound throaty and musical.

“So, can I start you off with drinks?”

“Hipster beers for us both,” Tony says, waving between himself and Rhodey.

“Club soda's fine for me,” Happy pipes up, peeking over his menu with a shy smile. “I'm on the clock.”

Red gives them a grin. “Sure thing, boys. Back in a sec.”

Tony thinks the fact that she comes straight back with their drinks has a lot to do with how well he'd tipped her the week previously, and he's glad for it.

“Thanks, Red,” he says, taking a sip from his glass.

“You can call me Natasha,” she says with a shrug. “If you boys are going to be regulars here, you might as well know my name.”

Tony grins up at her. “Well, fair Natasha, we came for wings, and we will continue to do so every Wednesday until the end of time.”

“Except when you have meetings,” Happy says with a grin.

“And except when I'm on deployment,” Rhodey shrugs.

“Right. But all the other Wednesdays,” Tony says. “Wings.”

Natasha laughs again, then holds her hands out in supplication.

“All right, then, boys. What kind of wings are we having?”

Tony grins up at her, propping his chin up on his fist. “All of 'em.”

Natasha raises an eyebrow. “Again? Last week you barely made a dent.”

“Yes, that's true, but this week I'm only drinking beer, and we brought Happy.” Tony gestures at the chauffeur beside him.

“This guy's gonna eat six pounds of wings?” she asks dubiously.

“This guy's gonna eat ... probably six pounds of wings. And if not, he's going to be sober enough to remember they could become take-out.”

Natasha grins and turns to leave. “Seventeen dozen wings, coming right up.”

They spend the hours of the evening picking at wings, sipping beer and laughing. Natasha comes to check on them repeatedly, and Tony decides he likes the girl. She's feisty, and funny.

Tony, along with Rhodey and Happy, spends his Wednesdays at Phil's Bar for the next five weeks. They chat, and laugh, and Natasha serves them every week. They chat on slow nights, and Tony learns a little bit more about her. She's working her way through law school, and she's been working summers at Phil's since her twenty-first birthday.

She seems to be a hard worker, and Tony's always liked rewarding that sort of activity, so when he swipes his card in the machine at the end of the night on the third Wednesday in August, he adds two zeroes onto her tip. She's told him she heads back to school in three weeks, so he knows they'll have a new server soon, and wants to show his appreciation before she goes.

As Happy escorts Tony and Rhodey out the doors – this time Rhodey is the one stumbling, though only a little – she chases after him.

“Mr. Stark! Wait!”

Tony turns, sighing, knowing it's coming. *Oh, Mr. Stark, you're so kind, please bone me.* Or something to that effect. And normally, yeah. But since the whole thing with Steve, he's just not – he's maybe a little gun shy, is all. So he puts on a polite smile and gets ready to lose his new favourite wing joint.

“Mr. Stark, I think you made a mistake with the debit machine,” she says, panting, eyes bright.

“Sorry?” Tony says, a little surprised.

“I think – I mean, I can't – this is too much.”

She waves the receipt in his face and he grabs it, examining it.

“No, that's right.”

She points at the numbers. “No, you see, that's the tip, there, and that's too much.”

“Looks right to me.”

Natasha blinks at him. “Mr. Stark, that's a three-thousand-dollar tip.”

Tony nods, slowly, to make sure she understands. “I am, in fact, a math genius,” he tells her, keeping his voice light. “I do know what the number three thousand looks like.”

“I can't accept that,” Natasha says, crossing her arms.

“I think you can,” Tony argues.

“No, I can't. It's obscene.”

Tony grins, enjoying the way anger flashes in her eyes, colour high on her cheeks.

“You're a bright young woman, and you work hard. You deserve it.”

“Mr. Stark, there is no one on the planet who deserves a three-thousand-dollar tip. You need to take it back.”

Tony barks out a laugh. “I've never had to work so hard to get someone to take my money.”

Natasha's eyes widen, as though she's just realized something. “You don't think I'm going to sleep with you, do you?” she asks, stricken. “Because you can't buy me, asshole.”

Tony laughs again, leaning against the wall and crosses his arms.

“I don't usually have to work that hard for *that*, either,” he says. Tries not to think about the last time, tries not to think about Steve.

“I don't give a shit. I'm not fucking you for *tip money*,” she growls.

He puts his hands up placatingly. “Don't worry, Natasha, that's not why I tipped you. I just think you work hard, and I know law school is expensive. You're a good-looking girl, but you're not really my type. I tend to stay away from women who can probably break me in half.”

Natasha stares him down, then glances back at the receipt slip in her hand.

Tony's expression softens. “Seriously, Natasha. Take the money. I can afford it, and you really have done well by us this summer. We've always had good service.”

She worries her lip between her teeth, and Tony can see her warring with herself over it. Finally, she seems to accept his explanation at face value, and pockets the receipt.

“I – thanks, Mr. Stark. I really appreciate this,” she finally says. She looks as though she wants to say something else, but Tony stops her.

“You can call me Tony,” he says, stepping away from the building toward the car, where Happy and Rhodey are already waiting inside.

“Thanks, Tony,” she says with a smile.

* * *

“Nat, where the hell did you get this money?” Steve asks, waving the wad of cash Phil had tipped her out with in her face, as though she hadn't already seen it.

Nat shrugs, twisting her mouth at him. “I told you, I got good tips last night.”

Steve stares at her for a moment, then his face drains of colour. “Nat, you're not – I wouldn't judge you, honest, but you're not, like, *stripping* or –”

“Oh, my God, Steve, what the hell is wrong with you?” she growls, interrupting him.

“It's a legitimate question, Nat! Who tips four thousand dollars?”

Nat rolls her eyes, grabbing the wad of cash out of his hand and packing it into an envelope, then folding it into her pocket.

“No one tipped me four thousand dollars. You know that's from *all* my customers, right?”

“Okay, point. But even so, how busy was the bar? Clint never comes home with that kind of money.”

“He's not as good a server as me,” she says, smirking.

“Hey! I'm not a part of this,” Clint says from the sofa, where he's watching television and pretending not to eavesdrop.

“Nat, this is a *lot* of money,” Steve says again.

She sighs. “Fine. I had one big tipper last night. Rich guy. He's a regular, and I've mentioned I was going back to school soon, and so he tipped me three thousand.”

Steve narrows his eyes. “And you didn't flash him or anything?” He's sort of joking now. Sort of.

She hits him, a little harder than he'd like.

“No, asshole. Just a nice guy.”

“Rich nice guy? Hard to believe.”

“I know. I never would have thought so, either, but he's been coming in all summer.”

Steve sighs. “Okay. Fine. Just – be careful.”

She rolls her eyes and goes to sit beside Clint.

“Your hearing aids are Stark Tech, right?” she asks, stealing a piece of popcorn from the bowl in his lap.

“Yep,” Clint says, glancing over at her.

“Sweet. You know, my big tipper? Tony Stark himself, believe it or not. Every Wednesday, like clockwork.”

Steve freezes. Clint's head whips around to stare at him, and Nat is looking between the two of them in confusion.

“What?” she asks.

“That goddamned –” Steve starts.

“Steve, you don't know –” Clint tries.

“What the hell do you mean, I don't know? You got a better explanation?”

“Well, no, but –”

“He's fucking – Nat, you can't go back there.”

“Excuse me?” she asks, her voice affronted.

“Look, I can't explain it to you, but I think Tony Stark might be ... stalking me.”

Nat bursts out laughing, and Steve wants to be annoyed at her but he's too busy trying to draw breath.

“You actually – no, wait, you actually think Tony fucking *Stark* is stalking *you*?” she asks through peals of laughter.

Clint and Steve exchange a glance, again, and Nat starts to sober.

“Wait, seriously?”

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose. “Seriously, Nat. You can't – he knows where you work now.”

“Steve,” she says, “he's a really nice guy. Isn't he?”

“He seems that way, I know. I thought he was, too. But this is just –”

“Maybe it's a misunderstanding?” she says. “You have to tell me what's going on.”

“I can't. Not all of it. But I met him last fall.”

“Okay...”

“I – he was a client. And then ... he wasn't. I told him he couldn't be a client anymore.”

Nat raises an eyebrow at him.

“And then he showed up here. Unannounced. He found our address, and just showed up one day,” Clint explains, leaning forward.

“I didn't give him our address, Nat. I don't know how he got it.”

Nat looks between them again. “All right. Sketchy. What next?”

Steve looks at Clint helplessly. “Well, then he started frequenting my sister's bar and getting close to her.”

Nat stares at him. “That's it? He showed up at your house? And then went to a public establishment?” Nat snorts. “Steve, that really doesn't qualify as stalking. No judge in the world would –”

“We're not telling a judge, I'm telling *you* to stay away from him. He could be dangerous.”

“You're overreacting,” she says, glaring. “We need the money, I can't stop showing up for work.”

“Why aren't you listening to me?” Steve says, voice rising.

“Look, Nat, switch shifts with me on Wednesday. I'll take your shift, you can have my Thursday. You said he comes Wednesdays, right? So this week, I'll take your shift. Just to be sure,” Clint says.

“You really think he's dangerous?” Nat asks, this time letting real concern creep into her voice.

“I don't know. But I'm not willing to take the chance with you,” Steve replies, a hand on her shoulder.

“Fine. I'll switch you shifts,” she says to Clint. “I only have a couple weeks left anyway.”

Steve nods, satisfied. Nat leaves the room, and he turns to Clint.

“Look, man, let's not jump to any conclusions. I'll talk to him if he shows up on Wednesday, try and get a feel –”

“Not a chance,” Steve interjects. “I'm coming to Phil's Wednesday night. I'll talk to him myself.”

“You sure that's a good idea?”

Steve runs a hand through his hair. “It's been seven months, Clint. I've spent seven months trying to – it doesn't matter. Suddenly he's stalking me? Getting close to Nat? Going to Phil's? Hanging out in Brooklyn? There's no reason for him to be in Brooklyn, Clint. He lives in Manhattan. He's famous, and rich, and there are bars in Manhattan that – there's no good reason for him to be here,” he finishes lamely.

Clint sighs. “I know. But still. You sure you can talk to him without...” He waves a hand vaguely.

“I need to,” Steve says. “It's the only way I'll know for sure that Nat's safe. That he's not dangerous.”

“Not Nat I'm worried about right now,” Clint says, raising an eyebrow.

Steve chooses to ignore him.

* * *

Tony walks through the bar behind Rhodey, heading for their usual booth. He looks around for Natasha, but he spots a familiar blond head making its way over from the bar instead. He instantly feels a sense of panic.

“I didn't know you worked here,” Tony says to Clint as he gets to the table, arms crossed.

“Well, no. Why would you?” Clint asks, eyes piercing.

Tony sighs. “Sorry, man. We'll go,” he says, moving to leave the booth. So much for the perfect chicken wings – but if Clint works here, then all Tony will be able to think about is Steve, and he'll – it doesn't matter. Time to go.

“Wait, what?” Rhodey asks, putting a hand up to stop him from leaving. “This isn't – this isn't the massage guy, is it?”

“What? No!” Tony says, eyes wide, because he wasn't supposed to tell anyone about Steve and now Clint knows he did.

“You said blond and biceps, Tony, and this blond stranger here looks like he wants to use his blond biceps to knock you on your ass.”

“Jesus, no – Rhodey, fuck, don't embarrass me,” Tony says, and he can feel his ears going red. Him, of all people.

“Hey, man, I just came for the wings, you're the one trying to drag me out of my new favourite bar.”

“You told this guy about Steve?” Clint asks, voice deadly calm, and Tony puts both hands up placatingly.

“Rhodey can be trusted. It's fine. Besides, if someone was going to find out, it would have happened in the last seven and a half months,” Tony argues. He gentles his voice. “I wouldn't tell anyone. I wouldn't do that to Steve.”

Clint stares at him for a moment. “You actually did give a shit about him,” he finally says, after a moment.

Tony meets his eye. “Course I do.”

Clint narrows one eye, sizing Tony up. Just when Tony thinks he's going to move and let them out of the booth, the door swings open and Steve walks in. Tony is tempted to shrink back, hide from him, but it's not in his nature.

Steve looks around the bar, then zeroes in on their booth, stalking toward them. Toward Tony.

For a moment, it lightens his heart – just to see Steve heading his way. It's then that he realizes (admits) he's still not over Steve.

“What's going on, Tony?” he says, voice hard and tight. “Why are you doing this?”

Tony blinks, looking around at the other three men, wondering what the joke is. “Doing... what?” he asks.

Steve glares. “I told you I needed you to leave me alone, Tony, you can't just –”

“Hey, *you* came up to *me*,” Tony says, hackles rising. “I didn't know Clint worked here, we've been coming for *months*.”

“I know that,” Steve growls. “That's the problem. You can't get into my life by getting close to Nat –”

“Wait, what? Nat? Your *sister* Nat? I've never even met her, Steve, I have no idea what you're talking about.”

“Tony, she came home last week and told us you were a regular, and you were tipping her ridiculous amounts –”

“Wait, is *this* massage guy?” Rhodey asks, and truthfully Tony had sort of forgotten he was here. Forgotten anyone other than Steve was here, really.

“Outside,” he says, face hot, but voice cold. If he and Steve are going to have this kind of conversation, he'd rather do it with some semblance of privacy. “Right the fuck now.”

“Fine,” Steve grits out, stepping away from the booth. Tony slides out, cursing the gracelessness the action inspires, and stomps toward the door, fists clenching. He assumes Steve is following him, but won't turn to check until they're outside.

* * *

“What the fuck just happened?” Stark's friend – Rhodey – asks, looking up at Clint.

“They went out to talk.”

“Well, fuck that,” Rhodey growls, trying to slide out of the booth. “That asshole already fucked Tony up once, I'm not going to let him do it again.”

“He fucked *Tony* up? Steve has been moping for fucking months around the apartment, and now Tony's fucking *stalking* him,” Clint growls, crossing his arms.

“Stalking – what the hell are you talking about?”

Clint glances over toward the bar, where Bucky has been sitting all night, watching the exchange.

He slides off the stool and comes over.

“Bucky Barnes,” he says, calmly holding a hand out to Rhodey to shake. “Nice to meet you.”

Rhodey glares between them.

“I'm Steve's roommate,” Bucky adds, not taking back his hand. “And you seem to be a friend of Mr. Stark's.”

Clint watches the corner of Bucky's mouth come up in a smirk.

“And I think we need to let our boys talk outside for a few minutes and straighten out some misconceptions.”

Rhodey stares at him, eyes narrowing. Finally, after a long moment, he extends his hand to shake Bucky's.

Clint grins.

* * *

Steve is vibrating. Being this close to Tony again – no, he's vibrating with rage, dammit. It's anger. It's not nerves, or the spicy smell of Tony, or the way he moves with quiet grace.

“You need to leave me alone,” he says, when they're finally alone, out in the cool night air.

“I have *been* leaving you alone. I swear, until about two minutes ago, I didn't even know Natasha was your – your Nat. Your sister.”

“Oh, please,” Steve scoffs, twisting his mouth into an angry shape. “Of all the –”

“I swear, Steve. I had no idea. I had no reason to know she was your sister. It's a big fucking city, and she seemed like a hard worker, and Natasha's a common name. I wasn't talking to her, or tipping her to get to you, I was just –”

“You can't just buy people off!” Steve growls.

“I wasn't *trying* to. I told you, she works hard, she said she was working for tuition money, I *have* money – I thought I was being helpful!”

“You can't use her to get to me,” Steve says, knows he's repeating himself but can't stop.

“I wasn't! Jesus, Steve, I wasn't. I mean, don't get me wrong – I would, no question, if I thought you'd – but I didn't know she was your sister. How would I know?”

Steve isn't sure, actually. But he's still pissed, and shaking, and Tony looks – tired, honestly, but also amazing. His eyes are sparking, fire in them, and Steve feels a tingle in his belly he knows he needs to ignore.

Tony suddenly laughs, but it's brittle and sharp. It sounds like breaking glass to Steve's ears.

“God, this is so fucked up,” Tony sighs. “So fucking –”

“This can't be a coincidence,” Steve says, aware he sounds like he's pleading. “It can't.”

Tony stares at him. “Look, Steve, I'm sorry. I'll find a different bar. I just – we liked the wings.”

“Why are you even in Brooklyn?” Steve asks quickly, aware he should have asked this sooner, if he's going to believe Tony about this. “You live in Manhattan.”

Tony waves a hand at the quiet street. “You think I can just go to a bar in Manhattan and have a relaxing night out? God, Steve, I go anywhere in the city and I'm attacked by photographers and people wanting a piece of me – except here. I haven't been approached by anyone here, and we've been coming for weeks. All summer.”

“But you showed up at my *apartment*.”

“I – yeah, okay, maybe not my very best decision, but I just wanted to talk. You had run out, and I didn't get a chance to tell you – I didn't like how we left things. So I maybe hacked into your employer's network. So, bad decision. But I wasn't trying to, you know, *stalk* you.”

Steve suddenly feels like a heel, and stares down at the concrete sidewalk.

“I *am* sorry, Steve,” Tony says, quietly. “I wish – I shouldn't have pushed you. I shouldn't have come on to you, and I shouldn't have – I'm sorry.”

Steve blinks. “Wait, no, I came onto you.”

Tony chuckles. “I distinctly remember waving my boner in your face and asking to kiss you.”

“Well, sure, because I was – signals. I was sending signals,” Steve says, turning red, trying to get the words out of a dry mouth.

Tony stares at him.

“I took advantage of my position,” Steve grits out. “I'm the one that should be apologizing.”

“You really think – Steve, you didn't take *advantage* of me. I took advantage of *you*. Because I had these stupid feelings – this crush, and you didn't –”

“Feelings?” Steve suddenly says. “You didn't have –”

“Of course I did!” Tony explodes. “Steve, I – of course I did. I still do.”

Steve feels his stomach drop, but it's a different kind of drop. His heart pounds in his chest. “I – you mean that?”

And Tony must see the hope on his face, because his whole body suddenly relaxes.

“So. You still doing massages?” Tony asks after a moment of silence.

“Tony. I can't –”

Tony lets out a breathless laugh. “Not – not like that. I was making ... small talk.” He cringes as he says it.

Steve chuckles. “Out on the sidewalk.”

“You're right,” Tony says, his voice small. “I'm sorry. I'll get Rhodey, and we'll go.”

He turns to leave, and suddenly Steve can't let him. This brilliant, funny, smart, gorgeous man is about to walk out of his life for the second time, and all Steve can think about are the last seven and a half months of being underwater. Of loneliness. Of missing his chance.

Of missing *Tony*.

So he puts out a hand, and it closes over Tony's wrist, and it's like electricity between them. Tony stops short, and Steve swallows, deliberate, not letting go until Tony turns to face him.

“Have a beer with me?” Steve asks, his voice coming out raw.

* * *

At first, it's weird. Tony's so used to being without Steve that suddenly, sitting beside him in a booth, drinking a beer wouldn't have ever crossed his mind. So sitting in a booth with Steve, Rhodey, and Steve's friend Bucky is even further outside the realm of possibility.

But yeah, weird. And awkward. And Steve keeps throwing meaningful glances at Bucky, and Clint keeps coming to 'check on their table' repeatedly.

But at the same time, Steve is close enough for Tony to be able to feel his body heat and smell his earthy scent, and it's worth it.

They talk, and eventually Bucky leaves, and Rhodey leaves, and it's just Tony and Steve, talking. About the last seven months, about their lives before they met. Clint comes over to the table less and less frequently. Every once in a while, Tony touches Steve's hand, and

Steve not only doesn't pull away, he'll clasp Tony's fingers, or bring his other hand up to cover Tony's.

“Come home with me,” Tony finally says, body sidling closer. He knows he shouldn't ask, that they've only just reconnected, but he can't stop himself.

“I shouldn't,” Steve says. He sounds disappointed. Regretful.

“I'm not your client anymore, Steve,” Tony says, raising an eyebrow. “We're just two guys who met in a bar.”

Steve stares at him, and then suddenly a laugh burbles up out of his mouth, out of nowhere. His blue eyes dance with amusement, and Tony can't help but smile at him.

“Just to be clear – you're the one hitting on me right now, right?” Steve asks, head tilting down so he's almost within range for Tony to kiss. His eyes darken.

“Hell, yes, I am,” Tony says, surging up to capture Steve's mouth.

It's even better than he'd remembered. Steve's lips are warm and soft, but firm and strong, his tongue sliding out to meet Tony's, and Tony can't help letting out a little groan.

Steve pulls back first.

“You said something about your place?” he asks, darting the tip of his tongue out to lick his upper lip, as though chasing the taste of Tony there.

“Let's hail a cab,” Tony says, scrambling to push Steve out of the booth ahead of him. Steve laughs as he stumbles out, but regains his feet. Tony waves a credit card in Clint's direction, and quickly pays so they can leave.

* * *

Steve manages to keep his hands to himself in the cab. He's inordinately proud of himself for that one. His heart is pounding, and his nostrils are flaring at the scent of Tony's body next to him, but he keeps his hands in his lap, pointedly not looking over at the other man.

Tony chuckles to himself when he pays the cab driver, and Steve deliberately doesn't look at the meter to see how much a ride from Brooklyn to Manhattan costs.

They move through the lobby of Stark Tower, which, even at this hour, isn't deserted. They walk side by side, inconspicuous. Steve can't help but glance around, but nobody seems to notice them.

As soon as the elevator doors close, Tony is pressed against the front of his body, shoulder to knee, and his mouth is devouring Steve's. A soft moan escapes Steve's throat as his hands

claw at Tony's waist, trying to drag him closer somehow.

When the doors open at Tony's penthouse suite, Tony's hands are on Steve's chest, sliding up underneath his T-shirt, blunt nails raising gooseflesh.

“How did you worm your way under my skin?” Tony asks, and Steve tries to think of an answer. Tony doesn't wait for one. “How did you get in? How did you make me feel – God, you feel good.”

Steve feels himself pressed against the wall, and if he were to look around he might realize they're in Tony's kitchen. But he can't tear his eyes away from Tony's, whisky brown and dark with desire.

Tony pushes against him so Steve's flush with the drywall, and then he's sliding down Steve's body, pushing his shirt up and mouthing kisses down his chest, down his belly, until Tony's on his knees in front of him and Steve's not sure he's going to be able to stay standing.

“Gonna take you apart,” Tony mutters between wet kisses to trembling flesh. “Gonna drive you out of your mind.”

His nimble fingers work at the button and zipper, and then Tony pushes his jeans and underwear down enough to free his hard cock, and the air is cool on it.

“Tony,” Steve says. It's almost a plea, almost a sigh, almost an invective.

“Let me,” Tony says, pressing his tongue against Steve's hipbone, warm breath ghosting across the hard, smooth flesh of his erection. “Let me make you feel good.”

Who is Steve to say no to that?

“God, yes, Tony, please.”

And then, with no more preamble, Tony pulls Steve into the impossible heat of his mouth, wet suction and a skilled tongue causing Steve to reach out and grab a section of counter in order to keep his balance.

* * *

Tony uses one hand to make up the difference between the root of Steve's cock and his lips, moaning a little at the feel of Steve hitting the back of his throat. His other hand is pushing at his own fly, trying to grab hold of his straining arousal, trying to wrap a hand around it and jerk off while he sucks Steve down.

He just needs a little – just a touch, that's all. He won't come, can't afford to think he can get it up again after, but just a little friction would be fine. But he can't get his pants down one-handed – “stupid fuckin' hipster jeans,” he mutters, popping his mouth off Steve's cock for a

moment, then back down as he keeps trying to struggle, and then Steve is shaking, shuddering above him. Tony's proud for just a second, until he realizes Steve is *laughing* at him.

He slides his mouth off with a filthy 'pop', glaring up from the floor, where Steve's shaking helplessly, staring right back at him.

“You find something funny, Rogers?”

“Nope.”

Of course, he's still laughing.

Tony narrows his eyes, then leans forward and nips sharply at Steve's hip bone. It has the desired effect of stopping Steve's laughter, and he grins triumphantly, moving to take Steve into his mouth again.

“Tony, wait,” Steve says, a hand on Tony's shoulder to stop him.

Tony drops his forehead against Steve's hip, rolling to look balefully up at him.

“It's fine, just – wanna take this to the bedroom? I could help you with your hipster jeans.”

The fact that Steve manages to say it not only with a straight face, but with almost no hint of teasing in his voice, makes something that had clenched in Tony's chest release. He feels lighter, and softer, and warm.

“Yeah, baby. Let's go.”

Steve helps him stand – damned knees – and their hurried, frenzied passion is tempered as they exchange slow, deep kisses on their way to the bedroom. Steve stays true to his word and divests Tony of his jeans with much less effort than Tony had been expending, but he can't be upset because Steve's pushing him down, back onto the bed, and kissing him deeply. He breaks away long enough to strip off both their shirts, so they're fully naked, skin to skin.

Steve's hands roam over his skin, and Tony can't help but writhe under the touch. It feels like fire blooms under his nerves at every point of contact. Like Steve is a power source, and the only thing keeping Tony grounded in reality.

Tony pushes at him, and Steve rolls to the side, though Tony doesn't let him pull away, following right along with him so he can hover over him, thighs clenching around Steve's, hips grinding down.

Steve nips at Tony's jaw as their cocks slide together, and Tony shivers a little at the slippery friction. He reaches out and pulls a bottle of lube from the drawer in the night stand, pressing it to Steve's chest before diving down for another kiss.

“Get me ready,” he says, pulling back to mouth kisses across Steve's jaw, tongue licking at the shell of his ear.

He's pushed back, rolled again, so that he's on his belly, cock pressing into the mattress, and Steve kneels behind him, between Tony's knees. Open-mouthed, sucking kisses trail from Tony's shoulder, meandering down his back.

“I stared at your amazing goddamned back for *months*,” Steve murmurs into his skin. “All I wanted to do was lick each vertebrae.”

“I'm not stopping you,” Tony groans, curving his spine into the touch. “Not – God – not stopping you, but I really, really want to feel you in –”

The words are cut off as Steve's tongue furrows between his cheeks, hot and wet dipping into the crack of his ass.

“Don't rush me,” Steve says, nipping a bit at one buttock. His thumbs spread Tony apart a little, letting cool air brush against his hole, before Steve's hot, wet, perfect tongue dips in, gently breaching the rim, stretching the muscle.

Tony lets out a low, keening moan, not sure how to use words for a few moments as Steve's tongue tears him to pieces.

* * *

Steve relishes in the whimpers and low cries that emanate from Tony's throat, fingers clawing into the sheets as his hips rock back into Steve. Steve's own hands grip at the firm globes of Tony's ass, thumbs making small circular motions where the muscle meets his thighs, as he flutters his tongue, burrowing into Tony's entrance.

He could stay here for hours, he thinks, but more than anything he wants to feel that tight, perfect, slick heat around his cock, so he starts kissing his way up Tony's back again, teeth clamping down into the muscle of his shoulder, then his neck, hands working the lube bottle and entering Tony with two fingers.

His oral ministrations have worked Tony open a little already, so the two fingers go in with little resistance, and Tony moans in pleasure. Steve works them in and out, scissoring them. The stretch of his rim, the tightness around his digits, makes his cock pulse with a surge of arousal, and he sucks a mark into the back of Tony's neck while he works.

A third finger, then, alongside the first two, and Steve reaches to brush against Tony's prostate, the pads of his fingers pushing against it, and Tony's hips stutter as he cries out.

“God, Steve, I'm ready, please, just – just get in me,” Tony whimpers, hips canting back, and Steve slips on a condom and slicks his cock, the head resting against Tony's opening. He pushes in, gently at first, sliding slowly and steadily until his hips are pressed tight against Tony's ass, and lets out a low groan.

“God, you feel good,” Tony murmurs.

Steve pulls back and slides forward again, and when Tony makes only sounds of pleasure, starts speeding up his thrusts until he's set a deep, steady rhythm.

Tony lets out a cry with each stroke, his own hips pressing back to meet Steve, then thrusting forward to grind his cock against the mattress.

“Fuck, Steve, fuck,” Tony whimpers, one hand scrabbling back to clutch onto Steve's hip.

Steve doesn't respond with words, just presses wet kisses across Tony's back as he thrusts, trying to make sure he hits Tony's prostate each time.

Before too long, Steve's hips begin to lose their rhythm, and he can feel his balls drawing tight, so he slows down, pulling out, chuckling low at the cry of loss Tony lets out, trying to push back toward him.

“It's okay, baby, I just wanna see you,” Steve says gently, rolling Tony onto his back.

He's rewarded with Tony's blown pupils, lips swollen from being bitten, face flushed with pleasure. “Wanna see you when you come,” Steve sighs, lips surging forward to meet Tony's. Tony yields to him, moaning as Steve pushes his legs up and apart, pressing back into his body.

Steve kneels then, pulling Tony's hips up for greater leverage, and starts thrusting again. The new angle causes Tony to throw his head back, crying out sharply, even as he wraps his own hand around his bobbing cock, stroking it quickly while Steve continues to pump into him.

It's only moments before Tony's eyes screw shut, and his ass clenches down around Steve's cock, and spurts of white come streak his belly and chest. Then Steve is following him over the edge, filling the condom and vision going black around the edges as he rides out both their orgasms, shivering with aftershocks by the time he stops moving.

It takes a few minutes to catch his breath, and then he presses a gentle kiss to Tony's lips before sliding out, holding onto the condom, before he climbs out of the bed to dispose of it. He comes back with a warm, damp cloth, and uses it to clean the mess off Tony's skin, pressing gentle kisses where he's wiped.

He drops the cloth off the side of the bed and lays down, gathering Tony into him.

* * *

“Did you always want to be a massage therapist?” Tony asks after a few minutes, fingers lightly trailing over Steve's belly. He is well-sated for now, but his skin still shivers at the tender touch.

He grins. “Not even kind of,” he says. “The money's good though, and I needed something for Nat's tuition.”

“So, Steven Rogers, what *do* you want to be when you grow up?” Tony presses a light kiss to Steve's side, and Steve wiggles deeper into the bed.

“Well, I did a couple years of art school, actually. I wanted to be an artist. Not my most financially sound dream,” he says ruefully, running his fingers through Tony's hair. The exertion of their lovemaking has left it unruly and almost fluffy.

“Do you paint?”

“Mostly sketching. I still do it when I have free time, I just know it has to stay a hobby.”

“Let me pay for Natasha's school,” Tony says suddenly, pushing himself up on his elbows and twisting to look Steve in the face.

“What?” Steve asks, blinking. He feels a cold sense of dread crawling through his belly. “No, Tony.”

“I can afford it, Steve. More than that, it won't even put a dent in –”

“I'm not – I'm not fucking you for your money, here,” Steve growls, pushing away and trying to get out of the bed. How can Tony think that of him? After the evening they'd had? Steve thought they were finally getting over the misunderstandings and mistakes.

“That's not what I meant, Steve,” Tony says, holding his arm, keeping him from standing up. “I know that. It has nothing to do with – well, not *nothing*, but that's not why I'm offering.”

“Tony, if this doesn't work, I can't –”

Tony puts a hand over his mouth, effectively silencing him.

“I'm terrible at this stuff, Steve. So please just stop, hold still, and hear me out.”

After a moment, Steve nods, narrowing his eyes suspiciously, and Tony removes his hand.

“I like you, yes. That's well-established. I also like Natasha – I've gotten to know her over the summer, and I know she's a hard worker. She's going to be a good lawyer.”

“Of course she is,” Steve says, unable to help himself from singing his little sister's praises. He snaps his mouth closed at Tony's look.

“Yeah. So, if I pay her tuition – as a loan, if it makes you feel better – then maybe she'll come to work in my legal department. Doesn't hurt to have a good lawyer on my team.”

Steve crosses his arms, raising his eyebrows.

“You may speak, now,” Tony says with an amused glare.

“I think Nat intends to become an environmental lawyer,” Steve grins. “Not sure how much that'll help Stark Industries.”

Tony snorts. “You'd be surprised.”

“Look, Tony, I just don't think it's a good idea.”

“You could concentrate on your art. You wouldn't have to worry about money anymore. You can pay it back on whatever schedule you want.”

Steve sighs.

“Look, Tony, I appreciate the offer. I honestly do. But this is something I have to do. For Nat, and for myself. I love – that you'd do that for us. But I won't accept it.”

Tony sighs and stares back at him.

“Fine. Okay, fine. So you'll work yourself to the bone, and never have time for me. Which is a shame, because I was kind of hoping I could keep you in my bed for the next week, if you didn't have to get up and go to work.”

Steve feels a stir in his groin at the thought, surprised that, as spent as he is, his cock can still give a twitch of interest. “Don't you have to go to work once in a while?”

Tony snorts. “Honestly, Pepper is happier if I stay out of the whole thing, unless I have to sign paperwork.”

Steve grins. “Well, I don't know about you, but I don't have any appointments right *now.*”

Tony smiles gently at him. “You know, I'm not as young as I used to be. Might take a bit longer than that to, you know, be up to it.”

Steve kisses him. “Fair enough. We can always try again in the morning.”

Tony puts on an expression of mock horror. “Steven! I never said I wasn't willing to give it a *shot*. Pretty sure there are a few things I could do to you while we wait.”

Then Tony's mouth is pressing kisses down Steve's torso, and Steve chuckles, laying back with a happy sigh.

* * *

On Wednesday, Tony slides into his regular booth at Phil's, grinning as Steve slides in beside him. Rhodey rolls his eyes and slides into the other side, and Bucky pulls up a chair to sit at the end.

“You two are disgusting,” Rhodey sighs when Tony presses a kiss to the back of Steve's hand, where their fingers are interlaced. His eyes are dancing, though.

“If I have to remind you of when you and Carol started dating –” Tony starts.

“No, you should have seen Bucky and Clint when they first started,” Steve says, shooting a smug smile at Bucky across the table.

“At least our love wasn't *forbidden*,” Bucky replies with a pointed glare. “God, you two are like a bad TV movie.”

“Our current situation is completely above board,” Tony tells him, chin up. “I had my legal team draw up waivers, so Steve can't get in trouble.”

“Wait, that was an option?” Bucky asks, looking back and forth between them.

“If my idiot brother had *bothered* to tell me what was going on in his life, I could have *told* him that, and I could probably have drafted it *myself*, and none of this would have happened,” Nat says, cocking a hip against the back of the booth as she came up to drop off a round of the usual beers.

Steve's cheeks turn a little pink and he ducks his head. “We're close, Nat, but not *that* close.”

“I didn't mean the sex parts, *Steven*. I meant the crush you had on a client.”

Steve's cheeks turn pinker, and Tony wants to kiss him.

So he leans over, and he does.

“What was that for?” Steve asks him quietly, while the others roll their eyes or pretend not to notice the conversation.

“Nothing,” Tony says with a sappy smile. “Just... happy.”

He'd be happier still, if Steve would let him pay for Natasha's schooling, or let him pay off Steve's other debt, or buy one of Steve's sketches for an inflated price, but... There will be time for all of that later. For now, he's just happy.

* * *

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The following May, when Steve rises to his feet to whoop and holler when Nat's name is called out at her commencement, Tony stands up with him, going so far as to climb onto his

folding chair, much to Nat's dismay. Clint and Bucky are more reserved in their celebration, but not by much. They simply stand to clap enthusiastically.

But as Nat walks across the stage, she can see the sunlight glint off Steve's engagement band, and can only smile indulgently at them all, her eye catching Tony's as he winks, resting a hand on Steve's shoulder to climb down. She watches as, when the next name is called, they sit down, and Steve presses a gentle kiss to the side of Tony's head, right above his ear.

She watches her brother, full of joy, hopelessly in love, and smiles softly to herself.

Chapter End Notes

So that's my massage therapy AU. Thanks to everyone for your kind words, and your kudos. Interaction is very much appreciated! You can find me on tumblr, but I don't post a lot. I'm robintcj over there.

Works inspired by this one

Hands All Over (The Happy Ending Remix) by FestiveFerret

Both Hands (another Happy Ending remix) by Robin_tCJ

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